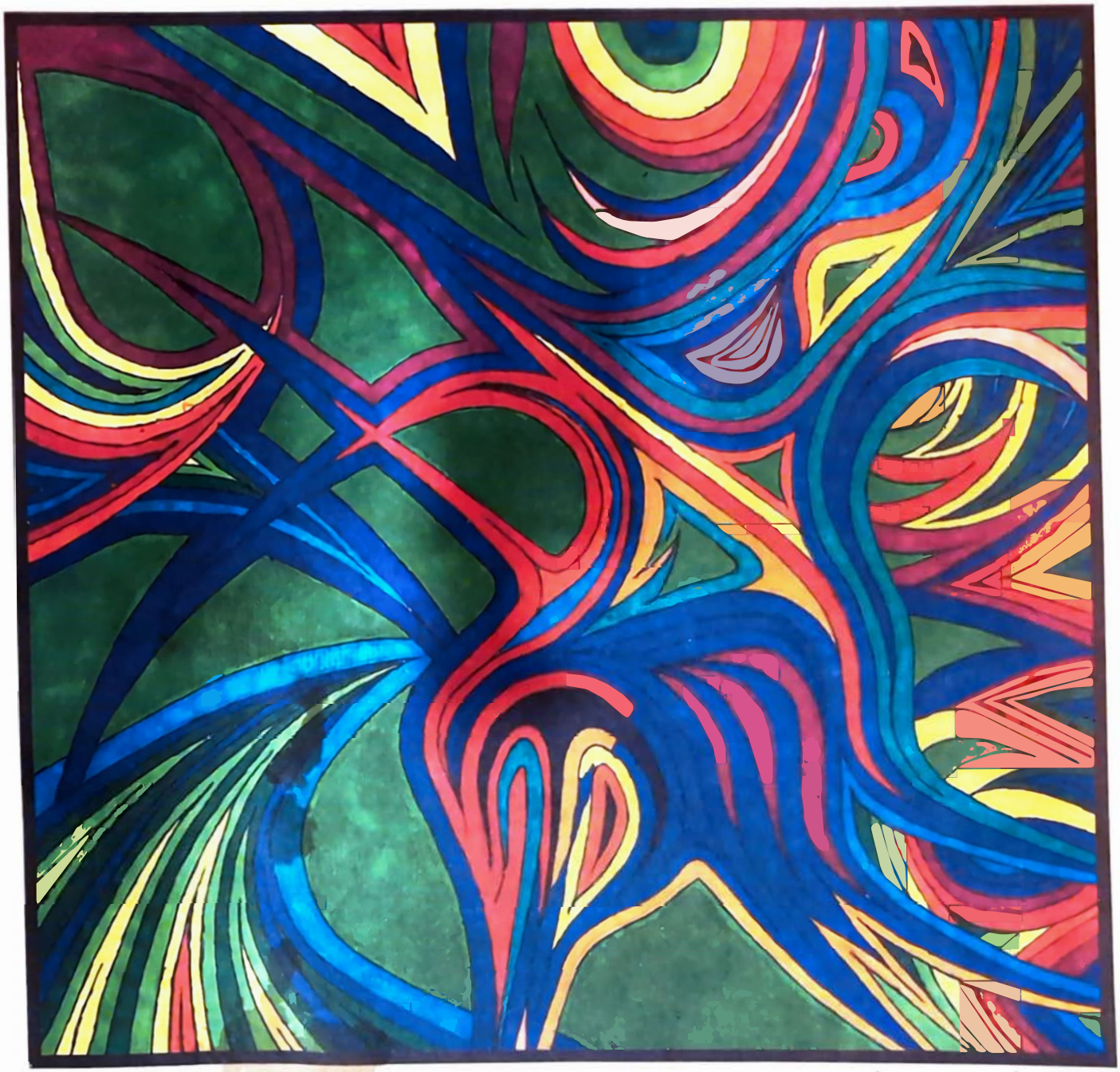
Colors of Courage



Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual and Transgender Life in Colorado Springs

Special thanks to the donors whose gifts
made possible the printing and layout of
Colors of Courage.

COLORADO COLLEGE
1 8 7 4

• gay • transgender • bisexual • lesbian •
Pride Center
of Colorado Springs

• PIKES PEAK
arts
COUNCIL •

Independent

Carole Mortenson and **Michele & Albert Acker**

Colors of Courage

Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual and Transgender Life in Colorado Springs

© *Colors of Courage*, published under the auspices of the Pride Center, is protected by copyright and its reproduction is expressly forbidden without written consent by the author or artist.

Special Thanks

Rebekah Shardy

The OutWord Writing Group

Editing: Laurie Wagner Buyer, Carole Mortenson, Nancy Wilson and Amanda Udis-Kessler

Layout: Kathy Conarro and Sally Piette

The *Colorado Springs Independent*

Cover Art Design: Ric Helstrom

Front cover art: Squirrel

Back cover art: William Knapp

"We must recognize our responsibility to not hide
behind the mockeries of separation that have been imposed on us,
which so often we accept as our own, and all the other endless ways
we rob ourselves of ourselves and each other. . .
My silences had not protected me. Your silences will not protect you."

— *Audre Lorde*

In memory of Gary Trachsel, brother and artist,
and the life he might have lived

CONTENTS

Welcome Letter, *Ryan Acker, Pikes Peak Gay & Lesbian Community Center* 6
Introduction, *Rebekah Shardy, Compiler and Editor-in-Chief* 7

Growing Up with a Difference

"What a tangled web parents do weave, when they think their children are naïve." Ogden Nash

Cante Mato, Secret Thoughts in Coded Language 10
Anonymous, Underground River 12
Hayden Matthews, Untitled I 13
Laura Colbert, Where I was Considered Normal 15
Kory Sampson, The Internet is Good for Just About Anything 16
James F. Miller, Coming Out to Play 17

Ready or Not, Here I Come (Out)

"I don't mind straight people as long as they act gay in public." *Bumpersticker*

Todd W. Craig, 150 Eighth Graders 19
C. Dana Martyne, A Double Life 22
John Robey, Outside Looking In 24
Laura, An Authentic Journey 26
Laura, Alibi 28
Hayden Matthews, Untitled II 29
Laura Colbert, Rainbow Bracelet with a Different Bead 30
Dorian Beth Wenzel, Why Gay Pride? 31
Margaret Duncombe, Thank You, Harvey Milk 33
Bob K., The Hall Closet 35
Anna Lavender, Outed By A Kiss 36

Love that Dares to Speak its Name (and a lot more)

"Sex alleviates tension. Love causes it." *Woody Allen*

James F. Miller, I'd Run a Pink Light For You Baby 39
Women of OutWord, First Love 40
Cante Mato, Illumination 41
C. Dana Martyne, I Explore My Love 44
Steven P. Rinkes, Chance Meeting 45
Nan C. Wilson, After 47

SAGE (Jamie Cotton), Derailed 48
Amanda Udis-Kessler, Ordinary Love 52
Susan, Billie 54
Aliya Mehdi, an expression only manageable when alone 57
Rebekah Shardy, Fireflies 58
Matthew Baty, Polyamorous 60
SAGE (Jamie Cotton), Becoming Shade 61

Parenting

"Your children are not your children. They are the sons and daughters of Life's longing for itself." *Kahlil Gibran*

Dara Hoffman, Dear Mom and Dad 63
Rebekah Shardy, Clearly My Son 65
Judd Lynn, Stand Up for Someone You Love 66
James F. Miller, The Visit 67

Spirituality

"We are all lying in the gutter, but some of us are looking at the stars." *Oscar Wilde*

Cante Mato, Two-Spirited (Winkde) 70
Women of OutWord, If Jesus Was a Woman 72
Malachi Truman Harris, To Be King of Israel: Jonathan and David (Excerpt) 73
Clinton Nicholson, Preacher Man 75
Rev. Wes Mullins, Christian Love for All 76
Lucinda T. Green, Change My World 78
John Robey, Earth and Sky 80
Return to the Goddess 81

Contributor Biographies

83

"Only dead fish swim WITH the stream." *Anonymous*

GLBT Community Resources

87

"Not knowing when the dawn will come, I open every door." *E. Dickinson*

Hayden Matthews, A New Path

Welcome

On behalf of Pikes Peak Gay & Lesbian Community Center, thank you for embracing *Colors of Courage*, Colorado Springs' first collection of real life stories from lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and allied authors in the Pikes Peak region. We hope this anthology inspires you to express yourself, live out your dreams, lead your life without boundaries, understand another's view, and to become — or continue being — an active agent for freedom and equality for all people.

Our hearts go out to the courageous individuals in this collection for their willingness to bare their souls and tell their stories so that others might learn about the rich history and culture of the lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender community, as well as the hardships often faced by GLBT individuals, their families and friends.

Though much work lies ahead, the existence of this anthology is a testament to the advancements we have made towards civil and social equality — as individuals, as organizations, and as a society collectively. These stories portray a dream of freedom and equality in progress and a promise that one day all GLBT individuals and families will be treated equally, and will be afforded fully the opportunities to live freely and without fear. Truly, this anthology is a milestone in the greater movement to advance humanity, and a world where people, regardless of their differences and similarities, are valued above all else.

Our gratitude to the many amazing people who have put this together cannot be expressed enough. Thank you to Rebekah Shardy for her dream, inspiration and leadership in the development and creation of *Colors of Courage*, and for her coordination of Colorado Springs' first GLBT writers' group — OutWord. Thank you to Ric Helstrom for his artistic design and guidance. Thank you to Kathy Conarro and Sally Piette from Colorado Springs Independent for their tireless efforts in laying out *Colors of Courage*. Thank you to those whose gifts made the dream of *Colors of Courage* a reality: Colorado College, Carole Mortenson, Albert and Michele Acker and the Pikes Peak Arts Council. And most importantly, to the amazing individuals who have decided to share their stories and their art so that our communities can benefit from their experiences, their hearts, and their voices — thank you.

I truly hope *Colors of Courage* will have — as it has for me — a positive impact in your life, for your world, and for your journey.

Ryan Acker
Executive Director
Pikes Peak Gay & Lesbian Community Center
"The GLBT Pride Center of Colorado Springs"

Introduction

How easy to *mis*understand each other – that is, *miss* the opportunity to connect to, respect and love each other. How effortless it is to stagger about like bowls of sloshing soup, brimming with fears and resentments that spill onto others, accidental victims of our sloppy suspicions and misdirected bitterness.

How powerful to understand another and risk faith in another's goodness. How wonderful to assume hearts like ours shudder with self-doubt, and to offer our refuge of compassion.

It is fragile and circular magic that reveals how we begin to see our own truth only when we open our minds to another, and vice versa. As a young mother, I was hardest on my little boy the days I woke unhappy with myself.

I believe it is this quest for informed connection that led nearly thirty gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender (GLBT) persons, ages 18 to 70, to share their life stories in Colorado Springs, a nationally recognized epicenter of intolerance.

When Richard Wright described being a black man in white America in *Black Like Me*, his words widened eyes and opened hearts before civil rights were respected in court. Honest memoir introduces us to the stranger we would never meet otherwise so that not only understanding, but also legislation, may arise.

Truth-telling is not without danger. When 19th century English poet and playwright Oscar Wilde ("One's real life is often the life that one does not lead") intervened in an ugly family conflict on behalf of a lover, he admitted homosexuality in court. As a result, he was jailed for "indecent acts."

Losing fame and fortune, Wilde learned what many GLBT persons know. It does not matter if they are wonderful parents, devoted sons and daughters, faithful to their God and productive at their work. They are one outing away from dismissal of their virtues and denial of their fundamental human worth.

However, secrecy can slowly kill. Poet and social activist of the 1970s, Audre Lorde, was freed by a sharpened sense of mortality to write in *The Cancer Journals*, " . . . if I had been born mute, or maintained an oath of silence my whole life long for safety, I would still have suffered, I would still die, if not sooner then later, whether or not I had ever spoken myself . . .What are the words you do not yet have? What are the tyrannies you swallow day by day, and attempt to make your own until you sicken and die of them? ... It is not the differences, which immobilize us, but silence. And there are so many silences to be broken."

Or, as *Colors of Courage* contributor Bob K., wrote, "I finally realized that a closet is just a vertical coffin."

With broken silences comes tumbled mythology. In the first chapter, "Growing Up with a Difference," it is the lie that children are sexless cherubs and not "already doing things." Sexual play and early gender identification informs adult sexual orientation. Hayden shares memories of being spanked for going shirtless as a little girl, suggesting orientation is as inherent as eye color.

Children may arrive with sexual instincts, but they won't know how to express them appropriately in adulthood without role models. In that void, they seek information to assist self-discovery. Laura Colbert describes relief on hearing acknowledgment of lesbians in a scene from the movie

Welcome

On behalf of Pikes Peak Gay & Lesbian Community Center, thank you for embracing *Colors of Courage*, Colorado Springs' first collection of real life stories from lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and allied authors in the Pikes Peak region. We hope this anthology inspires you to express yourself, live out your dreams, lead your life without boundaries, understand another's view, and to become — or continue being — an active agent for freedom and equality for all people.

Our hearts go out to the courageous individuals in this collection for their willingness to bare their souls and tell their stories so that others might learn about the rich history and culture of the lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender community, as well as the hardships often faced by GLBT individuals, their families and friends.

Though much work lies ahead, the existence of this anthology is a testament to the advancements we have made towards civil and social equality — as individuals, as organizations, and as a society collectively. These stories portray a dream of freedom and equality in progress and a promise that one day all GLBT individuals and families will be treated equally, and will be afforded fully the opportunities to live freely and without fear. Truly, this anthology is a milestone in the greater movement to advance humanity, and a world where people, regardless of their differences and similarities, are valued above all else.

Our gratitude to the many amazing people who have put this together cannot be expressed enough. Thank you to Rebekah Shardy for her dream, inspiration and leadership in the development and creation of *Colors of Courage*, and for her coordination of Colorado Springs' first GLBT writers' group — OutWord. Thank you to Ric Helstrom for his artistic design and guidance. Thank you to Kathy Conarro and Sally Piette from Colorado Springs Independent for their tireless efforts in laying out *Colors of Courage*. Thank you to those whose gifts made the dream of *Colors of Courage* a reality: Colorado College, Carole Mortenson, Albert and Michele Acker and the Pikes Peak Arts Council. And most importantly, to the amazing individuals who have decided to share their stories and their art so that our communities can benefit from their experiences, their hearts, and their voices — thank you.

I truly hope *Colors of Courage* will have — as it has for me — a positive impact in your life, for your world, and for your journey.

Ryan Acker
Executive Director
Pikes Peak Gay & Lesbian Community Center
"The GLBT Pride Center of Colorado Springs"

Introduction

How easy to *mis*understand each other – that is, *miss* the opportunity to connect to, respect and love each other. How effortless it is to stagger about like bowls of sloshing soup, brimming with fears and resentments that spill onto others, accidental victims of our sloppy suspicions and misdirected bitterness.

How powerful to understand another and risk faith in another's goodness. How wonderful to assume hearts like ours shudder with self-doubt, and to offer our refuge of compassion.

It is fragile and circular magic that reveals how we begin to see our own truth only when we open our minds to another, and vice versa. As a young mother, I was hardest on my little boy the days I woke unhappy with myself.

I believe it is this quest for informed connection that led nearly thirty gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender (GLBT) persons, ages 18 to 70, to share their life stories in Colorado Springs, a nationally recognized epicenter of intolerance.

When Richard Wright described being a black man in white America in *Black Like Me*, his words widened eyes and opened hearts before civil rights were respected in court. Honest memoir introduces us to the stranger we would never meet otherwise so that not only understanding, but also legislation, may arise.

Truth-telling is not without danger. When 19th century English poet and playwright Oscar Wilde ("One's real life is often the life that one does not lead") intervened in an ugly family conflict on behalf of a lover, he admitted homosexuality in court. As a result, he was jailed for "indecent acts."

Losing fame and fortune, Wilde learned what many GLBT persons know. It does not matter if they are wonderful parents, devoted sons and daughters, faithful to their God and productive at their work. They are one outing away from dismissal of their virtues and denial of their fundamental human worth.

However, secrecy can slowly kill. Poet and social activist of the 1970s, Audre Lorde, was freed by a sharpened sense of mortality to write in *The Cancer Journals*, " . . . if I had been born mute, or maintained an oath of silence my whole life long for safety, I would still have suffered, I would still die, if not sooner then later, whether or not I had ever spoken myself . . .What are the words you do not yet have? What are the tyrannies you swallow day by day, and attempt to make your own until you sicken and die of them? ... It is not the differences, which immobilize us, but silence. And there are so many silences to be broken."

Or, as *Colors of Courage* contributor Bob K., wrote, "I finally realized that a closet is just a vertical coffin."

With broken silences comes tumbled mythology. In the first chapter, "Growing Up with a Difference," it is the lie that children are sexless cherubs and not "already doing things." Sexual play and early gender identification informs adult sexual orientation. Hayden shares memories of being spanked for going shirtless as a little girl, suggesting orientation is as inherent as eye color.

Children may arrive with sexual instincts, but they won't know how to express them appropriately in adulthood without role models. In that void, they seek information to assist self-discovery. Laura Colbert describes relief on hearing acknowledgment of lesbians in a scene from the movie

Logan's Run and Kory describes the support of an electronic community, superior to his hometown in its depth of tolerance and breadth of information. (*Inside/Out* provides an alternative to surfing the Web, offering education and support to GLBT youth in a protected environment; see "GLBT Community Resources" at the back of this book for more information.)

The chapter, "Ready or Not, Here I Come (Out)," presents a complex, and often contradictory process. Every year, GLBT youth and adults die at the hands of bigots. As a result, coming out may not be done to everyone, and may not happen only once. We may choose to come out to a boss, but not a mother. Others are out only to their family and closest friends. To come out to different people, carefully selected for different reasons at different times, is a matter of staying alive physically, financially and emotionally. Here we read the agony of a wife who can't tell her husband of forty years that she is a lesbian ("Double Life") juxtaposed with the exultation of a schoolteacher who proudly displays a photograph of his husband on his desk. The reality for many is that of "The Hall Closet," in which a real yet hidden self frets for the "phantom me" that walks the world, alone even in company.

Coming out may cause quakes and tremors in the social landscape, but it often begins as a delicate inside job. Laura Bennett writes, "Before I 'came out' I needed to 'come in' and see myself in an authentic way." Self-reflection can be sparked by flammable relationship, described in Anna Lavender's "Outed by a Kiss," in "Love that Dares to Speak its Name (and a lot more)." Transformational "First Love" provides the courage to come out, but it is day-to-day reliability and routine that contributes to long-term "Ordinary Love." Amanda Udis-Kessler incredulously wonders how a politician can find it "more of a threat ... than terrorists." Although painted as alien and lurid by fevered imaginations, GLBT love can be plodding and playful as in Nan C. Wilson's "quacking like ducks," and as sublime and ridiculous – often at the same time – as it is for straight people.

The chapter on "Parenting" describes another kind of love that is no different, no less fraught with fear and triumph, for GLBT or straight people. "Spirituality" is perhaps our greatest bedrock of connection. This chapter presents affirming GLBT experiences within Native American, Judaic-Christian, Buddhist and pagan experience. Cante Mato describes a Divine Being who loves all, regardless of human distinctions. " . . .I saw a compelling wink from a universe I sense to be entirely conscious, full of great humor and beauty, most aware of my appreciation for it... He knew what I was too, and found it just as beautiful."

The contributors to *Colors of Courage* may not be as fluent and persecuted as Oscar Wilde, or as gifted and ferocious as Audre Lorde, but they are heirs of these literary parents who risked all to speak honestly. They realize with Wilde that "To regret one's experiences is to arrest one's development. To deny one's experiences is to put a lie into the lips of one's life. It is no less than a *denial of the soul.*"

It is the art of liberation through revelation succinctly summarized by contributor John Robey: "An artist is a hero who sets himself free."

May there be such liberty. And justice. For all.

Rebekah Shardy

Growing Up with a Difference

Secret Thoughts in Coded Language

(from "The Spirit Beneath the Skin")

Cante Mato

When the image first appeared, mysterious and strange like the grainy footage of a faraway moon, I was sitting in front of the television set one lazy Saturday afternoon, watching a religious program on a local public access channel.

The image, the first I'd see depicting a same-sex relationship, was presented as a cautionary tale on the dangers of sexual deviation. The low-budget dramatization featured two unearthly men identified as 'lovers' who were portrayed as dangerous, lustful creatures led by temptation to absolute corruption.

As if watching a National Geographic special on Brazilian insect life, I found myself peering closer at the screen with both repulsion and fascination. I wanted to switch the channel as I viewed the montage of shadowy, censored images, but I needed to see how their story ended, feeling excited and terrified, invested in a way I could not identify.

It was the early 80s and I was nearing puberty when cable television was introduced to our family. This became my primary means of sex education, squinting into a static video signal late into the night long after my parents had gone to sleep, waiting for the images to materialize in the snow before me, astonished by their blatant carnality when they did.

Neighborhood boys occasionally watched with me, sometimes proposing we play the game of "doctor" afterward. I understood it to be no more than a game, despite the feeling of resentment I harbored when my desire to explore further lingered, and my attraction to the boys ultimately became a force I could no longer ignore. Their dirty palms were my palms, their tousled hair was mine, their rugged demeanor and aggressive tendencies mirrored my own, and yet there was still something unidentifiably different inside me beneath my skin, behind my heart. I thought all boys felt it at one time or another. It soon became apparent I was simply unable to turn off my particular feelings.

At a church yard sale, I discovered a purple fedora with a green feather. I knew it was meant for a woman but it was only twenty-five cents and fit my head perfectly. It made me feel like one of Duran Duran's band members although I was teased mercilessly whenever I wore it. Men had their own type of clothing, as did women, and one didn't mix and match from both camps. I was a boy, and I was expected to dress as such. It was another one of those rules, one I still couldn't completely grasp.

Afterward, watching the exaggeratedly deviant men in the public access program in their pink cardigans and lavender turtlenecks, I was instantly put off. I did not want to grow up a homosexual if it meant I'd end up dressing like my grandmother, so I disposed of my little leprechaun hat, trading it for a trucker cap with Chewbacca on the front. Still, I would think of those men every now and then. Were they alive? Were they happy? Were they still zipping somewhere around the city in their white convertible, their chiffon scarves blowing in the wind? Had someone bent them

into something they didn't want to be? If they'd died, had their mothers come to their funerals? Who prayed for them?

In sixth grade, my curious longing blossomed into my first crush for a boy in my class, one I caught observing me. I got so sick of looking at him from the corner of my eye that I simply switched desks so I could sit next to him. Eventually, he began to smile at me and I sensed in him, that supposedly deviant attraction to members of our own sex.

One morning I summoned enough courage to brazenly pass him a note in which I stated I was gay. I didn't know what to expect as I held my breath. I was afraid of being made fun of, fearful my note would be passed around at recess or simply forwarded to the teacher. Instead, he quickly scribbled something and shot the note back to me. Unfolding it, my heart caught at the words:

"I'm gay, too!"

The ensuing sensation was both a fever and a chill. It felt as if my soul had caught a glimpse of true completion, and was informing my body of its great joy and hope. I thought of the constellations above me, all the different reflections of God, and felt as if I were staring at yet another.

I had stumbled on a secret garden where I could be happy, where the truth could not be twisted into something unrecognizable, where I could not be bent. I had finally found a way home. This boy was the answer to my prayers. It was as if God himself had delivered his note.

The boy invited me to a sleepover at his house soon after. He led me to his backyard and threw a football at me. As we awkwardly tossed it back and forth, he explained how it was unnatural for boys to feel the way we did, how it was required we bury our feelings deeply so that we never felt them again. His father stood at the kitchen window, watching us, old sports trophies gleaming behind him. I was assured that the more football we played, the more normal we would become. We played until our arms throbbed with pain, until the father left to work in the garage, until I realized I would indeed have to suppress the way I naturally felt in this world.

Beneath my disappointment, a rage erupted within me that the boy betrayed me, that his cowardice affected me so deeply. I had come from a bloodline of hunters, of warriors, and I knew I could fight for what I both needed and wanted, however exhausting that might be, but not until I was older, stronger, more resourceful.

For now, it was obvious I had to separate my heart from others, from myself, fearful I would give too much away. I would have to silence that desperate voice, the one that spoke to me louder and louder with each passing year.

A destructive fire burned in my heart as I threw the ball back one last time, hard enough to knock the boy off his feet.

Before the school year was out, I would take my first girlfriend. I would also begin a journal of all my secret thoughts, using only the first letter of someone's name in case it was ever discovered, using so many codes that eventually none of it made sense and I was speaking an entirely different language.

I would hide my tendencies well, as I would have to do with my true emotions, for many years.

Underground River

Anonymous

In fifth grade, I met Malinda, an African-American princess with countless braids flattened by pink barrettes, and a no-nonsense starched skirt she nervously smoothed over skinny knees. I was the bookish girl visible only to her teacher.

Malinda and I had much in common; both of us were smart kids of blue-collar, poorly educated, morally strict families. She was a Jehovah's Witness and I was raised in a Christian sect that forbade everything, including black friends.

During lunch, while our classmates exploded into the world, we ate packed Oscar Meyer sandwiches in the dusty classroom. Malinda, who watched soap operas with her grandma over summer break, suggested we act out daytime TV dramas.

We soon reached emotional highs by imitating marriage, unfaithfulness, divorce, and other adult hijinks. There seemed to be more - - but what? We wandered outside. She suggested we blindfold and lead each other around the playground. Trusting each other blindly built even more emotional vulnerability and intimacy, those ancient bridges to the erotic.

I ventured other suggestions that involved the far reaches of the playground, just inside the tall storm fences that separated us from the woods where evil men lurked. We were taking on all the boundaries that our cautious and pious mothers warned against. It was heady. It was exciting. It was wonderful.

And immediately regretted. We recoiled and grew distant. Malinda feared that she would be ostracized for befriending a white girl when we entered junior high. I had forsworn anything happening sexually again with anyone, psychically cramping from religious guilt.

The unstoppable river of the natural erotic went underground as I focused on school, coping with family craziness and surviving adolescence. Eventually, it bubbled up like an irrepressible spring, as I struggled, like most gay kids, with identity. That wasn't really me, was it? I was a good girl. Studious. Religious. As we grow up, we realize emotional truth is truth. Inevitably, the rivers we hide widen and spill out to larger seas. Malinda is probably a grandmother now. I wonder if her eyes are still doe-like, long-lashed, and sweetly shy.

Untitled I

Hayden Matthews

Digging deep in my mind through scars and secrets, I summon memories of my childhood. I recall being six years old and playing with my older female cousin. When we would pretend, I would always be the boy. It was normal for me to wear boy clothes so I wouldn't get my dresses dirty. If we weren't inside pretending in a game of house or school, we were outside. I would strip off my shirt the second I was out of my grandma's sight and play in the mud, with bugs, chase snakes, and always try to outrun my cousin. She told me I took pretending too far.

As we grew older, my cousin often told on me for playing shirtless. I would get spanked and lectured on how little girls didn't do things like that. I never argued with my grandparents. I never told them that I didn't think I was a girl. They would someday see that I was acting normal.

At age nine, I moved in with my father, his wife, my stepbrother and half sister. My stepbrother and I shared the master bedroom. Everything he did, I mimicked. If he wanted to hang out with his friends, I wanted to tag along and be one of the guys. He found me annoying beyond all reason, and often beat me up for being such a nuisance. My stepmother thought I had a crush on him, but he was my guide. No one knew he was just my portal into the boy's life.

Puberty hit me on the last day of school in fifth grade. I hadn't been allowed to attend sex education classes, and didn't hang out with the girls, so I didn't know what my body would go through as a female. I screamed when I looked in the toilet and saw a bit of blood. I ran to my stepmother. She explained that I was maturing and my body preparing me to become a woman. As that conversation ended, I wished my first judgment had been correct. Learning that I was becoming a woman was worse than finding out I had a terminal illness.

At twelve, I began to have noticeable breasts. After September 11th, my father raped me. My stepbrother learned of it and blackmailed him. This led to two more assaults, one by my brother, and one by his friend. I told no one at first. I was sure this was normal because there was no way this was an out-of-the-blue thing to do.

One day I got fed up with everything, and told my stepmother. She didn't believe a word I said, called my father home from work, and we had a long talk. He ended up calling the cops, and they decided nothing happened, but I should go back to my grandparents. They thought I just needed an excuse to get out of my father's house, but accepted me just the same. Two years later, my aunt confessed that my father did the same to her when they were younger.

I entered my new school planning to be tough and wanting to make friends. I did both. I was funny, smart, and knew how to protect myself when kids made fun of me for not being a normal girl. I developed crushes on girls quickly, but never pursued anything because I knew they would find it odd. In junior high school, I dated boys because I liked to hang out and talk with them, but I never wanted to hold their hands or kiss them. I wouldn't go on more than one date with them.

When I began high school, I was nervous. My emotions for girls kept getting stronger. Luckily, I found someone to talk to about my thoughts and feelings. A junior in band was teased for her mother being a lesbian. I took the opportunity to shyly come out to her as a person who developed crushes on females. She introduced me to the movie, *Boys Don't Cry*, and I identified with Brandon. She explained I could change my body if I wanted, and suggested I wait to decide. She introduced me to her friend, who I dated for three years.

In those three years, I came out to my grandparents, was kicked out at sixteen, and moved in with my girlfriend and her family, and eventually, our own duplex. We planned to share the rest of our lives. I bought her a ring and she bought me a strap-on for our second anniversary. It was like a dream come true. I felt powerful when I wore it, manly even. I wore it from that day on.

My girlfriend ended it with me and I moved back to Colorado Springs. I discovered *Inside/Out* for GLBT youth and got to know a female-to-male youth who runs transgender groups. I began to cautiously ask questions about transgender issues. I also went online and began searching everything I could about transgender people. The blogs were the most informative thing for me.

I learned testosterone could cause a sense of clarity, stability and peace of mind. Within a week or so on hormones, your voice begins to crack. Once on testosterone, you won't get your old voice back.

Hormones can also reshape your face and body to match a male physique. You may obtain thicker, faster-growing body hair. Breast tissue breaks down, and this process is aided by binder use. Testosterone also enlarges the clitoris. You may grow taller and gain another shoe size. Hormone therapy, for females to males, may also increase sex drive, energy, stamina and hunger.

There are risks. Emotionally, testosterone decreases the ability to cry and increases the level of anger. Since your ovaries stop functioning, ovarian, uterine and breast cancer are more likely. Like men, you face higher risk of heart disease, high blood pressure and liver failure. Hormone therapy is like going through puberty again - - acne, mood swings, the works.

Once I start hormone therapy, I must stick to it for the rest of my life. I could preserve my eggs. I know some transgender men put a pause on testosterone and take estrogen to have children, but I've always wanted to adopt. The thought of taking in someone's unwanted child and showing them love has always been a dream for me.

I understand hormone therapy is not a quick fix to all my problems. It will be easier to pass as a man but I will still meet resistance. I'm choosing to change my body one step at a time while I'm young. I choose to be responsible and follow this plan through to keep those who care about me reassured that I'm not the typical teen. I know what I'm signing up for.

Where I Was Considered Normal

Laura Colbert

I always knew my orientation. I never questioned it. I never denied it. I was fine with it, but the environment I grew up in told me that others were not. Sitting at the dinner table when I was nine years old told me a lot.

My father reminded me of Archie Bunker. He was a racist, sexist man who constantly talked about blacks, Jews, gays and "those kind of women," meaning feminists. My mother had a few choice words to add, saying, "Bisexuals are the worst kind." Obviously it wasn't the kind of environment that supported diversity.

On the other hand, my first friend was black. My best friend was Jewish, and, well, I had a crush on her. So I knew I couldn't take my parents' words to heart. I also knew I could never tell another person in my life. Who could imagine coming out when your parents, and how they feel about you, are your whole life? It was a lonely, isolated paradigm, and it was mine.

That began to change the day I saw a movie: *Logan's Run*. It was the late 1970s and up till then everything I heard about homosexuality was negative. In the movie, a man came on to a woman, and she avoided his advances. He stopped and said, "Oh, I'm sorry, do you prefer women?" He actually apologized. She wasn't wrong for being lesbian. It was normal, and he acknowledged her right to be who she was. I was ecstatic. Suddenly the closet door cracked open and light came through. I reasoned that there had to be other people who felt the same way I did.

I wasn't alone. I could actually imagine a universe where I was considered normal.

But those people weren't the norm in my life yet. When I was sixteen, the ringleader of my clique said, "We're so glad you're finally dating a boy; we all thought you were lesbian." I thought it was the perfect time to come out, since someone else had brought up the topic. "Well, actually . . ." But she stopped me right there, telling me she didn't want to know.

And if she didn't want to know, no one did.

It was back in the closet for me.

The Internet is Good for Just About Anything

Kory Sampson

I typed in the familiar address to my favorite online journal website and wracked my brain for a perfect new username – a mixture of wit and teenaged angst. I felt as if I was headed for a cliff, and now I had the opportunity to either jump off or climb down and start an entirely new path. So I entered the "Find by Interest" box and typed one forbidden word – "gay" – and began my careful descent.

I made the typical introduction post: "I am seventeen years old, female, live in Colorado and think I'm gay." Several responded with "Welcome," and "How are you?" that led me to another community – one that intrigued me like nothing else had before.

This community was addictive to me. It was immaculate, and was made up of the most interesting people I had ever imagined. There were tomboys, androgynous women, butch lesbians, gender-variant identified women, genderqueer folks, and most intriguing of all, female-to-male transgender and transsexual men. The deepest and most hidden part of my soul knew that I was just like them, but it would take months for that fact to make its way out of my heart, through my throat, and roll off my tongue.

I was in awe as I read post after post of "passing tips," how to handle work problems and hormone dosage questions. I remember being taken aback by how amazing some of the transgendered males' bodies looked after surgery, how hardcore one guy was after he said the only thing he shaved anymore was his face.

Months passed after creating my new identity over the Internet. I cut off my hair and changed my wardrobe. I checked the posts on the online community every day, sometimes twice. Watching the conversations between these people enlightened me and gave me a world of knowledge that was previously out of sight. After only three months, I felt like an encyclopedia.

I felt that my exploration was, and would remain, trivial. One day, after months of taking in every piece of information that was available, something clicked. The knowledge I had about myself completely surfaced and I spent the entire day in a daze. I knew who I was, and I couldn't believe it.

The Internet not only helped save my life, but also to rebuild it. My addiction to the Internet faded and I no longer felt the need to check the websites on a daily basis, but it was a crucial part of my life and becoming who I am today.

I cannot describe the euphoria I feel from being myself entirely. I now feel that I have accomplished something big, even if I can't always pinpoint it, even if it is only something small within me. I feel elated. I feel dignified.

With everything said and done, I know now exactly who I am.

And with that comes possibility.

Coming Out to Play

James F. Miller

Doing things,
already doing things.
On the other side of the wall,
sometimes you crawl over
and we hide
in the dark
huddle, cuddle,
then wake.
Starving to eat,
we gorge,
become sated,
exude fresh energy
across the table.
Then we nap,
help bring each other out,
moment by moment,
kiss by kiss,
touch by touch.
Secretly,
you climb back
over the wall
before dusk
to your own world.
Maybe we can't be together forever,
but every time you cross the wall
we can be together right now.
And someday, maybe someday,
We will cross the wall for good.

Ready or Not, Here I Come (Out)

Photo by Gushikawa

150 Eighth Graders

Todd W. Craig

My voice shook. I couldn't make eye contact.

I came out of the closet, and every cliché fear percolated to the surface: fear of judgment, fear of being talked about, fear of being real, fear of being the running joke in the halls of junior high school.

The time had arrived, however, to tell 150 eighth grade English students that their teacher, Mr. Craig, was, in fact, gay.

***

The week preceding the announcement had been a flurry of changes. My husband, AJ, and I had begun the adoption process and were recently chosen by a birth mother. Our original plan had been for AJ to stay home, but with a baby arriving more quickly than anticipated, it necessitated that I take a leave of absence from teaching.

***

It's not that I hadn't thought about telling my students that I was gay before. When students came into my room on a Monday morning and asked, "Hey, Mr. Craig. What'd you do this weekend?" I would dream of what the reaction would be if I said that my husband took me out to dinner and a movie.

I become quite adept, as most closeted gays, at dancing around the issue. There were no pictures on my desk. I avoided talking about my personal life, and if pressed into doing so, I always used "we" and other gender non-specific pronouns before moving on quickly to other topics. Students didn't ask, I didn't tell.

***

The unit I was teaching was a favorite. We studied persuasive essays, culminating with "The Letter from Birmingham Jail," by Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. The letter begs to be read aloud. It was written in response to Birmingham's religious leaders who called King's protests "unwise and untimely." King took his critics to task in a point-by-point argument that ranks among the most powerful ever written.

As I looked over those words in preparation for the next day's lesson, I couldn't help but put them in the context of my own life. The words begging, pleading, and ultimately demanding both justice and equality never rang so true, knowing I was about to become someone's dad. As much as it was a call for all Americans to stand against racism, and for black Americans to identify their race with pride and dignity, it called me to come out to my students as a gay man, explain the reality of my family, and change my little corner of the world.

I was aware that my little corner of the world was Colorado Springs, probably the most politically conservative, anti-gay city in the state, if not the country. I moved here from the Denver/Boulder

area because my husband was here, and I was in love. He was so hot I would have left my job, sold my house and moved to the gates of hell.

In my first years of teaching in this strange new land, it was not unusual to notice students wearing their religious affiliation on the sleeves of their sweatshirts. Youth ministers visited the school. I had students whose parents worked for Focus on the Family and Young Life Ministries. A large number of both students and teachers attended New Life Church to listen to ever-popular Pastor Ted Haggard take stances against every gay issue that came along.

This wasn't going to be easy.

I taught the lesson as planned. I read a truncated version of King's letter aloud. Kids analyzed the argument with zeal, and wrote passionate responses. With five minutes to go, the room fell silent except for the scratches of pencils on paper. I summoned my courage and their attention back to me.

"Hey guys. I need you all to look up here, put your pencils down, and just listen a minute. I have an announcement to make." I took a big gasp of air.

"I know sometimes adults don't always tell you the whole truth. Sometimes because they have something to hide, sometimes because they don't trust you, sometimes because it's just easier." I looked out at the 14-year old faces. They were rapt in attention, sensing something big was coming.

"So I've got two big announcements that I need to make, and I need to be completely honest with you about both because they're going to impact you."

"First of all, I'm gay. I have a beautiful husband and we've been together three years. I know some of you may believe, or have parents who believe, that being gay is wrong. I want you to know I respect your religious beliefs, and I'm not standing up here trying to brainwash any of you against your beliefs."

The faces staring up at me reflected shock and surprise. The air began to compress around us, and any previous comfort level disappeared. The kids looked like they wanted to escape, and I was overwhelmed by the urge to continue talking, if for no other reason than to fill the dead air.

"Second, my husband and I were just picked to adopt a baby. I'm going to be a dad. The baby was born a few days ago, and I'm taking the next few months off to take care of a newborn boy … my son." My voice cracked.

What happened next filled me with hope for the future. The kids asked questions. Was I happy? What's your husband's name? Who's our sub gonna be? When will you be back? Do you get to name the baby?

I was sure there was going to be some interesting dinner table conversations that night between my students and their parents. It wasn't until the end of the school day that I learned my announcement had been trumped. Another teacher broke the news about Ted Haggard being outed by a gay prostitute.

I can't say there wasn't any negativity or fallout after the day ended. A couple of kids transferred

out of my class. I had some explaining and apologizing to do with administrators. By and large, the amount of support from students, parents, and teachers overwhelmed me.

I've come to revel in my role as the English teacher who happens to be gay. I don't make it a point to talk about my personal life, but I don't dance around it any more. My desk is proudly filled with photographs of my family. Kids ask what I did for my husband on Valentine's Day. It's not unusual for teenage girls to ask my advice on dating guys when it's time for the big school dance.

There's a measure of both relief and freedom as result of the coming out to my students in ultra-conservative Colorado Springs. It taught me that my students can be trusted to make things more equal for others in the future. The biggest lesson I've learned is that if you give most people the benefit of the doubt, they rarely disappoint you.

Hopefully, by the time my son is a teenager, if we all stand up and take care of our little corners of the universe, then the world – even junior high school, for God's sake – will be a safe place to be gay.

A Double Life

C. Dana Martyne

I walked silently past his bedroom door on the way to the study. It was after midnight, and I knew my husband would be fast asleep.

I wanted to read my new lesbian magazine.

We had slept in separate bedrooms for years, hadn't had sex for years. I couldn't stand for him to touch me anymore. I gave him the excuse that I was old and dried up and just didn't want it. He accepted that.

The real reason was because in my late fifties, I discovered I was a lesbian.

I couldn't tell my husband I was gay. He was a good man, a good husband, a good father. I couldn't hurt him. I no longer had any emotions toward him, but couldn't leave him, either.

I wound up living a double life.

During the early days of finding out my new sexual orientation, I found a lesbian book group at the GLBT community center and joined them. I began to spread my wings a little, buying lesbian books and magazines and hiding them in my study, scared to death I would be found out. I joined a couple of other lesbian groups, always covering my tracks with a false alibi. I lied to my husband about going shopping, when I was really meeting lesbian friends for lunch or a movie. Lies became the only mode of existence, in order to survive and still live the lesbian lifestyle.

I was also afraid to tell my lesbian friends that I was married. They would wonder why. Most were divorced. How could I tell them I couldn't hurt my husband by divorcing him? I felt they wouldn't understand. I found one woman who was sympathetic, and I was able to confide in her. We became close friends. She is still my best friend.

The stress kept building and I found myself in therapy to try to deal with the situation. I had broken down and was crying uncontrollably one evening, and was carried away to the hospital where they diagnosed me with moderate depression. In therapy, I worked through a childhood trauma, growing up and living in a traditional marriage, and raising two sons.

But not knowing how to deal with living a double life was the main reason I was in therapy. I found myself at times on the verge of suicide, unable to find a way out. How could I be who I really was as long as I was married? But how could I hurt my husband? What was the use of even living any longer? I couldn't stay in my traditional marriage, and I couldn't live the lesbian life. I was pulled in two directions at the same time, trying to balance both lives. It wasn't working.

Then I met a single, available woman and fell in love. I had no choice but to tell her I was married. The problem was that she said she would not be a part of my life as long as I was married. So I started looking into getting a divorce. I didn't know if I could do this. I didn't want to hurt my husband, but I knew I had to do it because I was not complete without a woman by my side. There was no going back now.

I had hardly worked during my forty-year marriage, and started to seriously look for a job - - first enrolling in computer classes, then rounding up applications. I told my husband I'd like to go to work. Since our grown sons had their own lives to live now, it would give me something to do. He agreed.

I began to look at rental ads for an apartment. I had never lived apart from my husband for more than a few days at a time. I knew nothing about living a single life, let alone living with a woman.

I got my finances in order. That was the easy part. I had taken on the responsibility for paying the bills years ago, using my husband's income, since I had none of my own. I paid off a few personal bills and began saving money.

A few months later, I was ready to start the ball rolling. I found a nice little apartment to move into until the woman I loved and I decided what we were going to do. I was finishing my computer classes. I had some job applications out there. I had saved enough money to live for six months, if I was frugal. I bawled and bawled, wondering how I was going to do this. Forty years of marriage down the drain because I found out who I really was.

For almost five years, I had kept my sexual identity from my husband. Now it was the only direction to go.

Before I could tell him, my husband went into the hospital with a heart attack. We were planning living arrangements for him, as he would need extensive care. He could never go back to the life he previously had. His health was still precarious. How could I divorce him now? I would never be able to live with myself if I hurt him when he was down. Now I knew I would never live the life I was destined to live. My heart was breaking.

Whoever is out there in the universe and looks in on us pitiful human spirits heard my cries of distress and longing. I didn't have to do a thing.

Two months after heart surgery, my husband – still in the hospital – died of complications that had nothing to do with his heart.

That was the only thing that saved me. I was sad, but at the same time, I relished the freedom I now had to live as a lesbian.

I now take part in many events in the GLBT community and love every minute of it.

The woman with whom I fell in love decided that she didn't want a relationship with me after all.

I have a new lesbian friend, and who knows what will happen?

Outside Looking In

John Robey

Now that I am middle-aged with health problems that sometimes make me feel much older, I've had more opportunity to reflect on my life. I grew up in the 1960s, the older child and only boy in an Air Force family that moved frequently. I fully expected to fall in love and marry (a woman), father 2.5 children, and live in a house preferably without a picket fence.

As a boy under the age of ten, I knew the term queer was pejorative, long before I knew it was slang for gay or homosexual. The dictionaries I consulted said that queer meant "odd, eccentric, unique, different," and I was enough of an individualist even then to find such words non-threatening, although young boys called each other queer as the ultimate put-down.

In the 1970s in junior high, the counter-culture sparked by the Vietnam War was still going strong. It was a time of hope and change even in the midst of atrocities at home and abroad. The struggle for civil rights and equal rights went forward, despite assassinations, police brutality, reactionary violence and political wavering. I was taught to consider myself a member of a worldwide species that has variation in hair, eye and skin coloring – a citizen of the planet. We may have been an Air Force military family, but my parents were both intellectual thinkers who looked beyond the peer pressure norms they learned in the 1950s.

It wasn't until I began working in college that I truly developed an appreciation for the differences created and reinforced by society based on race, gender and socio-economic status. As a privileged white male many presumed to be heterosexual, I had a certain level of access and credibility within society. As a young adult queer, I felt invisible – but that was good, right? – blending in and passing for straight to avoid harassment, prejudice, discrimination and possible violence. I understand the appeal of living in the closet, even as I can't do it. I also understand the appeal of living in a gay ghetto where it's safe to hold hands and kiss publicly, as heterosexuals do, having lived for a time in such a neighborhood in Denver.

The Community College of Denver in the 1990s was liberating – an institution that valued diversity, where I had served on the campus GLBT Advisory Board for Students. After listening to I don't know how many fag jokes from straight male co-workers who assumed I was also heterosexual, it was refreshing beyond words to work where I could bring all of myself to the table, where being gay or lesbian was no more remarkable than wearing eyeglasses. It was where I learned being out didn't mean flaunting as some heterosexuals contend, but rather being honest about one 's self, provided the environment isn't toxic or hostile. It shouldn't be anymore shocking or titillating than living as a heterosexual. Being gay meant living an authentic life, as I had been striving to do since my late teens.

Being gay has afforded me the opportunity to be "on the outside looking in," to see that society at-large oppresses everyone, rich and poor, men and women, by telling us who, what and how to be, rather than empowering us to live authentically. While there's plenty of distrust and hatred to

go around for every segment of society, we each have the opportunity to overcome this within ourselves, and to collectively make positive differences in our families, friendships and communities.

It has allowed me to look beyond the fiction of race to the reality of socioeconomic differences, based on ethnicity and culture, and see the common ground I share with those who are different from me.

Being gay has supplied me at, at times, with feelings of profound alienation, but also brought me the deepest intimacy I've ever known.

An Authentic Journey

Laura

I always knew I was bisexual. But it took me almost twenty years to proclaim the word.

Bisexual. It brings images of having sex with more than one person at a time. Or sleeping around a lot. Or not being able to commit to a relationship. For me it just means I am attracted to – and enjoy having intimate relationships with – people of different genders. It took me a long time to get here. Before I "came out" I needed to "come in" and see myself in an authentic way.

Growing up, I thought everyone was sexually attracted to both men and women. I thought most people chose one or the other out of convenience, social pressure, and a desire to make dating less complicated. It wasn't until college that I realized most the world seemed to be straight, and I didn't quite fit.

When gay friends came out to me, I was a great ally. It was bittersweet, and I felt hypocritical. I received praise for standing up with the queer community, but I didn't feel I was seen as part of it. I dated men - - how could I? At the same time, several gay friends pursued bisexuality as a way to determine if they were really gay (or lesbian). How can you test yourself to determine if you are really bisexual?

At some point, a couple of my close friends figured me out. They saw me looking at girls when we went to Family Night at the local clubs. They got the mixed messages that I looked at the tall, broad-shouldered guy and the soft, curvy girl in the same way. Meanwhile, I was challenged by my Women's Studies courses and not-so-subtle pressure from female faculty and friends to get off the fence, preferably to the side that didn't involve men.

I think I came to terms with this aspect of my identify when I realized that being bisexual didn't mean I had to have the same relationships with both men and women. I also realized being bisexual isn't just a private thing, like preferring a specific sexual position. As most feminists know, the personal is political.

The personal became political for me when my significant other asked me to marry him. I felt like a hypocrite because most of my other friends couldn't legally marry their same-sex partners. I also felt untrue to myself because he was a man, and it seemed like I was taking the easy way in life while others still had to carry a social burden. I still struggle with this at times.

I started seeking a way to belong. I learned how hard it is to find good books or songs or language about being bisexual. I began to miss the feminist bookstores, the gay clubs, and the larger presence of a queer population. I realized that I need to feel belonging within myself before I can find it outside.

For several years, I didn't feel the need to come out. I'm a rather private person, so sharing personal stuff didn't really appeal to me. After awhile, I realized that to be true to myself, I needed to be true about myself.

Coming out is bittersweet. I feel refreshed when I can be real with other people and myself, but I also feel scared of judgment, rejection and misunderstanding. I'm always amazed how much harder it is to do with the people that you care most about. I guess I'll take the good with the bad as I pursue authenticity in my own existence.

At the end of the day, whether I go to bed with a woman or a man, I have to be able to sleep with myself.

Alibi

Laura

I always felt like I needed
an alibi.

When my eyes turned to him
while I was talking to her
and she paused –
he is a friend of a friend, I said.

When I looked at her too long
and he noticed –
she looks like someone I knew
a long time ago, I said.

When I dance at the bar with a guy
and I ask if he has a girlfriend
I'm looking for a different answer
than most the girls he meets.

The ring on my finger
is a solid alibi.
I don't even get asked anymore
because of course I must be a wife
and have a husband
and want 2.5 kids
and a minivan.

I think I am more threatening
than effeminate men
or butch women
because I am
the girl next door,
or the woman you work with,
or your friend.

And it isn't about what did happen,
it's about what could.
I am tired of being categorized
and I don't want to make excuses
or assumed to be straight.
I don't need an alibi to be with you.
I just wish I didn't need one
for you to be with me.

Untitled II

Hayden Matthews

Mirrors. Labels. Bathrooms. Acceptance. Clothes. Choices. Gender. All day my mind focuses on the same stream of words.

Mirrors. Looking into a mirror naked makes me nauseous. Standing in front of the reflection and pressing down my breasts has become habitual. Seeing my vagina often makes me dizzy. Knowing my body doesn't match how I feel inside, that I feel I belong in a different body, leads to frustration. I view this body in the mirror and feel the knot in my throat. I allow a few betraying tears to spill onto my face. This is not who I am.

Labels. Working my hardest to achieve what society says is male or female. What if we grew up thinking gender was in the mind and not what's between your legs? The world relies on labels, perfect little boxes in a neat row. And if you decide to think outside the box, you're no longer needed by society. You don't matter.

Bathrooms. Public restrooms labeled male and female. I can sometimes use men's restrooms, if I'm feeling gutsy, and I'm not menstruating. I don't pass all the time, though. I know some guys wonder why I rush to a stall just to urinate. I used to hold it until I got home. The thought of entering a female's restroom is laughable. How easy it would be to go out in public and not stress over using a restroom, to not fear for my life, my presentation, my acceptance.

Acceptance. Walking down the sidewalk and smiling at people who smile back when they see a young person with short hair and a flat chest. Meeting strangers at bus stops and having light conversations with them without fear of them stepping away in disgust. Meeting a girl's parents as her boyfriend. Acceptance is the big goal in my life.

Clothes. Shopping for them, buying them, wearing them, and being comfortable. I have to bind my breasts, but if I wear too tight a shirt, I won't pass as male. Jeans have to be baggy in the crotch so I appear to have a penis. Long-sleeved button-up shirts help me achieve hiding my breasts and lack of muscle definition. Men's jeans offer a nice bulge in the crotch, and depending on how tightly I wear my belt, I can control the size of it. Clothes are key to passing. Until you speak, that is.

Choices. I choose my identity. It is up to me to decide how far to go with transitioning. I have the option to wait years, months, weeks or days until I begin the process of changing from female to male. I cannot choose the way society views and accepts me. I can only take steps to match what the world says is normal.

Gender. Male and female. Sexuality is whom you like to be with; gender is who you are. I am male on the inside. I have always felt this way. I want my body to match my emotions. I want to take steps so passing in the world will be easier. How I wish God created us as versatile as clown fish, or even worms. Life would be so much easier if there was only one gender, or, even better, no gender. How many lives would have gone unharmed if there were no gender, and we could live our lives in harmony and peace, free from hate crimes?

Love. Caution. Responsibility. Change. Patience. Family. Friends. Knowing people care about me, and without a doubt, I will be who I am no matter what.

Love. Knowing. Who. I. Am.

Acceptance.

Rainbow Bracelet with a Different Bead

Laura Colbert

In the middle of college, I worked up the courage to try to come out. My male friends would be easy. They wouldn't feel threatened by a woman coming out to them, but what about my female friends? Would they not want to be around me because I could potentially be attracted to them?

I chose my best friend for whom I had only platonic feelings. I guess pulling someone aside and saying, "I have something to tell you" must sound like you have cancer. Compared to cancer, it must have seemed a small thing to her, but it was a huge leap for me. I told her. . .and she was okay with it! She told me that as long as I didn't want her, she was fine with it. It was an honest answer, which I appreciated. Soon, all my friends knew.

My family was a different story. I was very close to my brother, so he just knew without me telling him outright. But my mom, my dad? I never had one of those pamphlets that tell you how to break it to your parents gently.

In the middle of college, I was accepted in a Japanese exchange program. My flight had a layover in San Francisco, where I met aunt and uncle for the first time. They were really easy to talk to, even about being queer. But I still had to tell my parents.

Then the letter arrived in Japan. I don't know what I wrote to my mom to raise her hackles, perhaps something about San Francisco.

She wrote, "I know that you would never allow a homosexual experience to happen to you."

"Geez," I thought. "No, ma, I would not allow it. I'd pursue it!"

I wrote back. It may not be the best way – writing a letter when you're halfway around the world – but it seemed best at the time. At least I was out. My parents and I still don't talk about it much, but at least they can't deny who I am any longer.

After that, I wanted to find others like me, to come out to my community. I think you have to find a community to understand who you are, learn from each other, feel that you belong, grow strong in the feeling that who you are is good, and eventually stand up against people who oppose you.

At the 1993 March on Washington for Lesbians, Gay and Bisexual Rights and Liberation I found my community. A whole bunch of them! It was glorious. I could wear my Pride t-shirt and rainbow bracelet and not be afraid. We were united for a single cause, the fight for freedom. I marched with hundreds of thousands and I marched with my community behind a bisexual banner.

I wear a rainbow bracelet all the time now. Yes, my rainbow bracelet has a different bead. It has a bi-flag on it. And though my story is like hundreds of coming out stories, at times I still stand alone. Like the colors of the rainbow flag, my bracelet stands for diversity. If one color was left out, it wouldn't be a rainbow. And there can be no freedom for the whole if all of the parts don't stand together: gays, lesbians, bisexuals, transgender people, and allies.

Why Gay Pride?

Dorian Beth Wenzel

Back in the nineties, I had a dispute with a neighbor in our peaceful, eightplex apartment building. She was an old-fashioned, middle-aged country girl, twice divorced and a mother of three, one a preteen boy. She lived in the apartment next to mine for more than three years. I was out to her and the others in our building, and everything was cool. Or so I had thought.

(Side note: When Colorado for Family Values in 1996 told the Manitou Springs Council they shouldn't use the word "rainbow" in a human relations campaign because they found it offensive for promoting the homosexual agenda. Manitou Springs' Council members stood their ground by not backing down to the Religious Right's pressure.)

When my two, tiny rainbow Pride flags were attached to the porch railing blew away in a terrible windstorm, I replaced them with a rainbow bandana I bought on vacation in San Francisco. That was when my nice neighbor turned into the wicked witch and decided she had to tell me her opinion about homosexuals.

My neighbor left a very disturbing note taped to my front door when I got home from work. Along with her opinion about my immorality, she said she found my "lesbian flag" offensive and didn't understand why I had to display it in public. Because the new flag was so much bigger (an eighteen-inch square), it was easier to see from our street. Even though we lived on a desolate, dead-end road, she was concerned someone would mistake it as hers.

She demanded I remove the offensive piece of rainbow colored cloth immediately before some stranger saw it.

Because we are in the heart of Amendment 2 country, home of the Colorado For Family Values and Focus on the Family ministries, this was not an uncommon request. Even my "Hate is Not a Family Value" bumper sticker has evoked harsh language from other motorists when I had a child in my car.

Her request made me feel violated in the sanctuary of my home. I had chosen to censor the depressing and discriminating local newscasts because of their bias towards gays in this town was depressing, and my neighbor's note pierced my heart like a knife.

So there I was, sitting in my unlit apartment at dusk, crying because I was shocked and hurt by her note. I thought about her bigoted, request. I thought about an angry mob of offended citizens, pounding on my front door. I became fearful.

I thought about how I could be evicted from my home, or fired from my job.

Why would we have pride for being queer? Why celebrate Gay Pride Month in July or Coming Out Day on October 11th?

Maybe it comes from the anger of being oppressed all our lives, from the strength to stand up to others and refuse to accept the lies they promote about GLBT persons.

We are everywhere and we are not going to go away. America has gone to wars and fought for the rights of others. It makes me want to scream at the top of my lungs in front of City Hall. It makes me want to kiss my lover and hold her hand in public and not care if I offend anyone.

Are we not human beings with families and jobs and housing like everyone else? Are we not mothers and fathers, brothers and sisters, aunts and uncles? We are single, in committed relationships, and even in heterosexual marriages, because some are too afraid to lose their families, friends or jobs to come out of the closet.

We need to become more visible so others will be less likely to vote for anti-gay legislation. We need to speak out against oppression and prejudice. Left unchecked, it grows into campaigns of hatred and fear against those who are different.

I replied to my neighbor's inappropriate request. I would not remove my pride bandana from the porch railing. I stated that all my life people have found me offensive for being different. When I was a child, I was told I would never be pretty or feminine enough. When I was a Christian lay-minister, I was told that although I was celibate, and giving my love, sweat and tears to the cause, I would never be ordained because I looked gay. I couldn't live by what others thought of me. I left the ministry in 1989 and never looked back.

I told my neighbor she didn't have the right to oppress my freedom of expression. I looked up the word 'bigot' in the dictionary and wrote its definition as "someone who is intolerant of another's beliefs." Did she find the strength to forgive my anger and see the truth behind my words?

Diversity is what makes people interesting. If the Creator wanted robots, I'm sure that's what we'd be.

Someday, one generation will rise up to the call of love, not hate. It will most likely not be in my lifetime, but if I am here that day, I will cry tears of joy.

Thank You, Harvey Milk

Margaret Duncombe Enjoy! Marg Duncombe

Winter 1986. A student asked me to help facilitate a discussion following a film. One of the film profs would be there to discuss the cinematic qualities, and my job was to get people to discuss the social issues. I knew the film was about Harvey Milk, the first openly gay supervisor in San Francisco, who was assassinated by Dan White, whose defense lawyer created the "Twinkie Defense" (the idea that crime could be caused by eating too much sugar) to reduce the crime to manslaughter. But I had not seen it.

The student offered to arrange a private showing so I could plan for the subsequent discussion, but I was swamped and didn't take advantage of the offer. One of the courses I was teaching was Deviant Behavior, so whether the audience wanted to talk about Harvey Milk, Dan White, or the 'Twinkie Defense," I was sure I could wing it.

Sitting in the dark, I thought I would wet my pants. Harvey Milk made the case that every gay man and lesbian had to come out. Only when every person who thought he or she didn't know any gay men and lesbians came to know us as family member, friend, teacher, minister, mail carrier, etc. would we have a chance at justice and equality.

These were powerful and terrifying words for me. I didn't wet my pants, thank the Goddess. Neither did I come out in the discussion following the film.

Technically, my sexual orientation was bisexual. My first lover was a woman. My second lover was a man. Both had their issues and quirks, but both were satisfying lovers. At some point, I decided my life would be better if my life partner was a woman. I knew lesbians were disparaged, even within feminist circles (the "lavender menace" and all that), but I thought no one would have to know. In other words. I thought that I could pass.

I doubt that I ever passed. My sister told me later that my life was like a neon sign. But I was deeply closeted, both at work, and with my family. Initially, I was closeted because I was scared my parents would refuse to pay my tuition, or that they would try to commit me.

Eventually, I graduated, got a job and had some job security. Mental health reform had eliminated the power of my father to get his physician cronies to commit me. The closet was no longer a strategic location to protect me, so why was I still closeted? Why did a gay male colleague's request that I co-facilitate a student group with him strike terror in my heart? The years of lying and hiding had taken their toll. Intellectually, I thought lesbianism was a valid choice, but emotionally I felt it was shameful, something to hide, lie about, deny.

I went home from watching the Harvey Milk film deeply disturbed, knowing I had to come out, terrified of doing so. The next day I told the campus chaplain who facilitated a student group. Subsequent days, I told friends and colleagues. Those were tortured conversations.

Most folks thanked me for telling them. In hindsight, I suspect they wanted to say, "Well, duh."

Some folks told me about their own same-sex sexual experiences. A few were negative, saying nothing or saying they couldn't associate with me anymore. I did co-facilitate the student group and I participated in a campus-wide program on homosexuality in which I told my story.

Becoming a public lesbian has been one of the most rewarding and most difficult changes I've made in my life. I've been part of important social changes. My home life and my work life are integrated. I no longer have two phones: a red one (disaster!) for family and work, and a black one (safe!) for friends.

My life partner of 40 years routinely attends my school and family events. My family welcomes my GLBT friends as their own. Have there been costs? Of course. In the language of Sociology, I have less "social capital." A few people have been insulting or told me they can't respect me; surely. I'm sorry about them. Self-respect is more important than their respect.

I like the woman I've become much more than I liked my closeted self.

The Hall Closet

Bob K.

We walk down the hall, my friend and I, discussing various themes.
We talk of important events and small trifles as
we walk down the hall, my friend and I.
But it isn't I who walks down the hall with my friend
it is one who looks like me, the other me, the phantom me.
I peer out from behind the door, the door of the closet in the hall
From the crack in the doorway, I can see us as we talk, and I hear our words
but I am behind my closet door, hidden and safe.
I watch my good friend, the one who has never met me, as he talks with me.
I listen to our words as we discuss this and that.
My heart races, I see the worry cross my brow, the brow of the phantom me
the me that walks the hall –
by chance our words came too close to the closet in which I live.
Will this be the day when my friend meets me?
    My straight friend, my friend of many years?
Will we walk the hall discussing things profound and trivial ever again?
Or will he now forever watch his words when I'm near?
No. With practiced skill the phantom me turns our conversation aside.
The change was quick to divert my friend's eye from my closet door,
but slow so he will not know I hide.
The me in the hall relaxes. My friend does not look back, he will not see me.
If he did, the door would open and
    I would be exposed and bare and walk the hall.
Fear keeps me behind the door, the closet door. The other me has greater dread.
If I ever walk the hall, I will be the only me.
So I work together
to stay hid, safe behind the closet door
    and the other me walks the hall
    with my good friend that I haven't met.

Outed by a Kiss

Anna Lavender

She tightened her eyes, leaned over and planted a full-mouth kiss on me. Unexpected, impulsive, delicious. Sweet sister, what have you done?

She got out of my car and opened the side of her VW van. She was inside, her back to me. "Wait, I want to kiss you again."

She shook her head, started her van and backed out of her parking space at the gas station. I felt a wetness, an unfamiliar juiciness on my underwear.

Kit and I had gone to Boulder that November day. She went with me to a folk dance class and we enjoyed moving freely to the music. We allowed our sensuous selves to emerge with no thought of children, husbands, jobs or obligations. I guess we were flirting with each other, but it didn't feel like it at the time. We were having fun, reckless with open glances and caresses when the dance called for physical contact. Even though my body grew tired, my enthusiasm carried me gladly to the next dance and the next.

We found an Italian restaurant in Castle Rock. Neither of us was anxious to get home. Pasta, marinara sauce, crusty bread and a smooth glass of Merlot took us farther into the dream of the astonishing day. Driving south again, I slowed the car, trying to stretch this time when we were admitting our deep friendship. I didn't realize we were also acknowledging our physical attraction. She took my right hand. No way was I going to fuss about keeping both hands on the steering wheel. It had been so long since anyone held my hand as a beloved.

The next few days were spent in private delirium. I managed to pretend to be present for my daughter and husband. I lost my appetite, my hands trembled, and I couldn't sleep. What was I going to do? Being unfaithful to my husband was hardly an issue. He was so unconscious. Long ago I determined I would jump at any opportunity for a sensual, sexual experience. Monogamy after nearly thirty years of marriage was up for reconsideration.

This was volcanically unsettling. I was totally surprised by my response to her kiss. I had no idea such a thing could be so enjoyable. Finally I realized what the big deal was about sex. It was the only thing my husband really thought about. He was always trying to feel me up, squeeze my breasts and push himself on me. I wasn't interested and didn't have an orgasm until I was thirty-two.

Oh, dear. I felt the irresistible compulsion to touch her, but this was the wrong gender at the wrong time. I was a completely heterosexual woman (or so I thought), a responsible presence in the Girl Scout and school community and married to an exceedingly proud man. What was I going to do? The strands of my life were so intertwined with my husband's that they were hard to distinguish. How could I go on knowing a woman turned on my sexual switch? It was all I could think about.

Kit's husband was traveling. I went to her house for dinner one night. She asked if I wanted a foot massage. I was pretty clear about what I desired and said "no" emphatically. I exclaimed that

I wanted to kiss her again. In a mood to be the perfect hostess, she began unbuttoning my vest. Faithful to her husband, she made it clear that neither of us was going to undress below the waist. And so began a delicious, arousing exploration of the ways women can pleasure each other with lips, tongues, and breasts.

That night we danced together to traditional folk tunes, a circle of two. Every tingling fiber claimed our sensual and sexual energy. Over dinner, we talked about her lifelong knowledge of her bisexuality, and my new discovery. I described the past crushes I'd had on girlfriends, teachers, and older women friends. We promised to live together after our husbands died.

Later, Kit refused sexual contact. She accused me of being in lust. While that was true, I also recognized my love for her. It was apparent she loved me too, but her mind was made up. She had made the choice to stay with her husband. I had to decide whether to stay with a man who turned my world gray, or step out into a new and unknown world of blazing color.

The rest of my story includes bravery, fear, betrayal, guilt and escape. With the help of several trusted friends, and my brother, I figured out how to leave my husband. It was a harrowing time, but now, ten years later, I am a firm believer in "Jump and a net will appear." Many nets caught me and eased me into a Technicolor world. Now I live authentically as a laughing, loving lesbian woman.

Love that Dares to Speak its Name
(and a lot more)

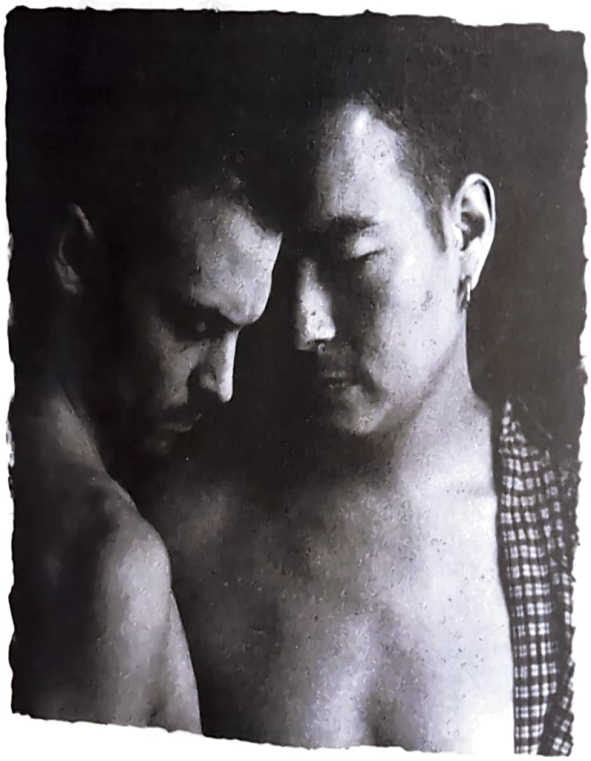


Photo by Lee Manning

I'd Run a Pink Light For You Baby

James F. Miller

I'd run a pink light for you baby
let you have my ice cream cone
eat my burger and my fries
and let you build my campfire in the night

I'd run a red light for you baby
when the heat was fine
you and I unfolding
on our bodies so inclined

I'd zoom the green light baby
as we got close to chime
no caution, pause for yellow
as we finished right on time.

No stop light when we boogie, no pause
to find a dime to keep the meter running 'cause
we don't run out of time. Our love, it lasts
forever. Our love is for all time.

I'd run a pink light for you baby
morning, noon or night.
If you'd stop what you are doing
and make me feel so fine.

First Love

A group poem by women in the GLBT writing group, "OutWord"

Dedicated to Amy – Charlene – Jan – Regina – Lee

seagreen eyes and windblown hair, crinkled nose and crooked smile,
hands round your coffee cup and later revelations
like the astrological clusters freckling your back

perfumed crash of ocean, children laughing, fragrant bread,
a train's call, spring frogs singing at twilight,
the swish of your approach and musk of patchouli

never had I felt so warm and giddy, yet calm;
breasts exposed, vulnerable yet safe
home at last on the soft leather of your old Chevy

we chased shadows, danced in kitchens, whispered beach-talk,
recited sonnets over school seats, twirled pendulums
and still could not guess what would follow

how the car would turn the corner and I'd wave
as your train left the station, then clench the phone listening to words
"she died in San Francisco": waiting on the front porch for you forever

remembering your breath, the scent of your hair,
the way my body resisted grief, the last convulsive sob against the belly,
and all the sounds that never rose in me

Illumination

(from "The Spirit Beneath the Skin")

Cante Mato

"I'm sorry, Michelle. I'm just . . . different. I honestly can't help it, believe me. I've tried. I'm miserable, I feel alone . . .Please forgive me. It's not your fault. You're wonderful, beautiful, I enjoy your company, but I can't feel what I'm supposed to be feeling."

I knew she really loved me, as had the women before her, and as always I was weighted down with a tremendous guilt that I could never feel the same way for them. I thought by now the simple art of kissing would have improved, but as before, I felt as if we had magnets inside our lips that constantly repelled each other.

I truly thought she was the one who could turn everything around, break my spell, save me. Although I admired the beauty of women, their natural humor and sharp intuition, they simply could never captivate me in a way that could ignite and consume me.

I watched as Michelle's eyes welled with tears. She was the last of the women I would intimately know. I vowed to remain alone. Where was the mythical place where gays met and conversed with each other in safety and peace? I thought of the fictional gay men I watched on television, men I believed were real, now dead, victims of a disease said to be manufactured by the wrath of God. How could one be punished for simply loving another?

I noticed the bold ad shouting up from a magazine's back page:

ALL AGES GAY DANCE CLUB

The nightclub was downtown. I looked at the gleaming city, its metal and glass towers, its guardians of enchantment as if I was really looking upon Oz like the Tin Man, off to see about a heart.

At home later, I lay in bed half awake, half asleep. The dance club was opening this evening, and I was chickening out. My father snored in the living room, I heard my mother's clatter of dishes from the kitchen, and my sister giggled on the phone in the bedroom across from mine. I jumped up and threw open the closet. This was not going to be what my life was about! I assembled an outfit both cool and sexy, rushed to the shower, ready to throw myself into the great unknown as if my life depended on it.

Thirty minutes later the cab I secretly phoned picked me up at the end of the street. By the time we entered the city, it was ablaze with light and activity. The driver dropped me off in the club's parking lot in a run-down portion of the city. I inhaled deeply as if preparing for a marathon summoning all the courage and will I could muster, and entered the dark, smoky nightclub.

Nothing ever turns out how you think it will. I realized that as I found a seat by myself at the end of the bar. No one came to greet me, and throw their arms around me, "Hey; you made it! We thought you'd never arrive!"

I cursed my naiveté and ordered a soft drink, looking nonchalantly around the disco. Many of

the men were wearing clothes that accentuated their biceps, abdomen and pectorals. Some of the women were not women. I could tell by their Adam's apples, but they were pretty, captivating in another way. Many completely embraced their masculinity in leather, Levis and cowboy hats. Others honored the feminine by dressing as showgirls. There were a couple of men in business suits, some casually dressed as females, and some in attire I had seen advertised in magazines like *Vogue*.

The prevalent archetype seemed to be that of the queen, as many of these mysterious people walked about like royalty, regal in their attire. They expressed physical perfection and perfection of personality, a kind that most likely went unappreciated through most of their lives. They radiated intimidation. I thought of all the muscles I built lifting weights and the dark New Wave clothes I wore at school to keep the bigots at bay. I knew these people were doing the same thing. I wanted to tell them they didn't have to do it, we were all the same inside.

I longed for someone to approach, sit and talk with me. I tried my best to appear happy and calm, but everyone was coupled, laughing, gossiping and dancing. If I wanted something I would have to go for it. I stood up and made my way through the circle of bodies to dance with them. No one came up to me, sent me a soda, passed me a phone number or offered me a ride home. I faced my fear and built up a little more bravery. I was proud of that. Still, in the back of the cab, all the way home, I sat astounded, crying.

The next weekend I went back and met the first of several boyfriends. It wasn't hard. I just smiled at him. He smelled of cheap wine and cigarettes, sitting in a dark corner by himself.

I had dreamt of this moment. Hollywood filled my head with myths of damsels in distress and brave knights who rushed off to save them. I wished to finally kiss a man under showers of starlight in a midnight breeze, held in warmth and promise, utterly complete. It would be poetic, beautiful and deep.

Instead, we simply secreted ourselves away at a playground near his house, paranoid and watchful of passers-by, hiding under the slide, too scared to be intimate. I was living with my parents. I didn't own my vehicle and hadn't even graduated yet, so he soon traded me in for an older, more resourceful man.

He broke up with me quickly. I found him in his corner of the nightclub, his apologies smelling like cigarettes and cheap wine. He hurried off for the dance floor, joining his new boyfriend as Madonna's music began.

Years later, working in a metaphysical shop, I met my mate, the one who had been created for me. He was shopping for jewelry. I pointed out rainbows I had ordered in support of the gay community. Holding my breath, I presented him with a silver ring containing those six familiar bands of color.

Several months later, we watched a spiritual television program in the home we shared. The program, filmed in England, featured a woman, an ordained priest, who had been in the meta-

physical store many times. Her work involved arranging tours of Stonehenge and education about the paranormal mysteries there.

When she returned to America, she married my mate and me.

She filled our goblets full of the special water brought back from England's Chalice Well, where it is said the Holy Grail was cast.

I Explore My Love

C. Dana Martyne

I explore my love
like I come to wilderness
I seek out the hidden treasures of her body,
searching for those amazing delights
that pleasure my senses.

I explore my love
like I feel my way beside a canyon wall.
I move my fingers along her slowly and surely,
anticipating the wonders that await me
around every smooth curve.

I explore my love
like I approach a whitewater river.
I hear her sighs and moans of longing,
pulling at me to cross over the rapids
into a pool of calmness.

I explore my love
like I gaze on a beautiful sunset.
I feast my eyes on her soft warm flesh,
blending with me at last in a never-ending rhapsody
of togetherness and love.

Chance Meeting

Steven P. Rinkes

While most people kept warm indoors, I sat on a bench in a city park overlooking Lake Michigan, watching the setting sun, feeling very alone. Or so I thought. I glanced over my shoulder and noticed a man standing by a tree, staring at me. I quickly waved and focused my attention on the water again.

I didn't give the stranger a second thought as I contemplated my life. Did I want to go to college? Could I even afford it? I tried to grasp what happened with my parents and hoped we could mend our relationship. I felt a chill down my spine as I turned to see the stranger was standing behind me and looking over my shoulder. I nervously stood and faced him.

"Hello. My name is Sean." He looked puzzled as he contemplated my outstretched hand. "Would you like to join me?"

He was six foot three of raw muscle, short wavy brown hair, strong jaw and cheekbones with a slight dimple in his chin. Looking into his eyes, you could get lost in the blue depths of his soul. Purple streaked his irises.

His nose was almost perfect with a slight angle to it, as if it had been broken, but it added to his allure. His muscles looked as if they strained to break free of his clothes.

He looked around and sat down next to me, so close that I could feel the warmth of his body and smell his musky scent, the smell of a man after a hard day's work. It was such a natural smell it turned me on as I stared at him and asked, "What's your name?"

Pausing a moment, he said, "My name is Ivan." His smile melted me.

"Would you like to get a pizza? I'm famished."

"That would be great," Ivan replied.

I pointed to my '69 Ford LTD. "I have to let the engine warm up for a couple of minutes. My baby is temperamental when it's cold out." I patted the dashboard.

We found a Pizza Hut, and pulled into the parking lot by the door. He held it open for me. I was starting to wonder, at least hoping, if he was also gay.

In a corner booth, we ordered sausage and pepperoni pizza. "Where's your family?" I asked.

"I'm from a little town in Illinois. My parents and sister were killed in an accident when I was sixteen."

"I'm sorry to hear that." I put my hand on his.

"I've gotten used to being alone." He took my hand into his and held it until our pizza arrived.

We ate in silence. I watched him, so methodical in his movements, with purpose to everything he did. "Where do you stay?" I asked.

"Wherever I find cover for the night. I don't stay in one place too long."

"Well, you could stay with me tonight. It's too cold and the snow is coming down fast." I wasn't

thinking that this was a stranger I just met.

"If it's no bother," he replied with a slight smile.

Once home, I told him he could take a shower. He surprised me when he asked me to join him. I hugged him, and kissing me on the lips, he picked me up and carried me to the bathroom without getting out of breath, as if I were a mere rag doll.

The next morning I awoke to the smell of bacon wafting through the apartment. My heart leaped when I noticed the table was laid out with juice, eggs, and bacon. Ivan was finishing up the French toast.

"I took the liberty of making us breakfast. Hope you don't mind?"

"This is wonderful. I feel like I'm falling for you."

We enjoyed the best breakfast I have had in my life, talking and joking before cuddling on the sofa while watching *I Love Lucy* reruns.

He was a tender lover and my love for him grew stronger with every passing year. I haven't seen him for several years now.

After

Nan C. Wilson

After
making love, we shouted in glee and laughed our heads off.
Then we thought about having a cigarette, although
we don't smoke.

After
making ourselves sick on imaginary tobacco,
we stretched and made fake snoring sounds.
We got up and paraded around naked.

After
discretely pointing out each other's flaws, we threw on clothes.
We squinted at the light coming in the windows.
We made pancakes and bacon and sat down to feast.

After
stuffing ourselves we looked into each other's eyes
quacking like ducks. We giggled until sunset.
Then we made love, shouted in glee and laughed our heads off.

Derailed

SAGE (Jamie Cotton)

I hesitated before answering the phone
knowing it would be you
gave myself time to taste the bitter remnants of our last night
"I need to see you" is all you said
I could not feel my body as I slid into the car
determined to end this thing
once and for all
this tragedy reoccurring
this nightmare interrupted momentarily by intermissions of day
this love so complex
we are dying in its maze
devouring each other in our attempt to stay alive
our only hope now
is to dismantle the whole thing
tear it down
tear it apart
light it on fire
and walk away
sometimes
there is just no smooth transition

But as I walk into the coffee shop with all of this
suddenly my body stops
it sees you and hits the wall of remembering
"I used to know you." It says
"I used to know everything about you."
I knew those small places
where worlds collided
and created new worlds
in the places they overlapped.
I knew the way sunlight dappled and played
on the landscape of your back
jumping from freckle to freckle
like children skipping across rocks
I knew the bigness of you
the rolling joy of your thighs
the thunder of your hips beneath me

the crushing wave of your body in ecstasy
orgasm always hit you by surprise
it was as if you couldn't believe it was actually happening to you
and your body filled the entire room with its glorious wonder

and I used to know your smile
like something desperate and beautiful
your face would explode into joy
an avalanche
water bursting through a dam
never subtly like a sunrise
but something that broke open
sudden and unexpected
fireworks
your face lit up my night skies
when I knew you . . .

and now I am walking towards you
I sit down across from you
I am talking
I am speaking
my mouth is moving
and words are coming out
but I have no idea what I am saying
I cannot hear myself
I cannot hear anything
the soundtrack of the world has been erased and replaced
with the sound of furious locomotives
racing toward each other
I am remembering the first time we made love
two trains
heading for destinations opposite and unknown
we should have flown smoothly past
but our tracks somehow got crossed
we crashed into each other
hard steel crinkling and buckling
glass shattering
contents spilling
head on
slow motion forces to be reckoned with
metal on metal

breaks squealing
ineffective to stop this tragedy
everything destroyed in its glorious wake

I think we backed up and did it again

and I am talking
and staring at the terrible curve of your breasts
and the tragic slope from your shoulder blade to your jaw line
and the treacherous landscape from cheek to temple
and then I am there
utterly lost in the impossible beauty of your eyes
you haven't even touched me yet
and I am gone

but then you do touch me
you reach across the table and pull me towards you
put your mouth on mine
and our tongues are dancing
our teeth keeping rhythm like only anatomy can
and that is when it happened
when the world melted away
all the people in the coffee shop just dissolved
fell over like some out of control Dali painting
fell into themselves
the table and chairs and counters
folded into squares
instant origami
and then imploded into nothing
the walls of the structure
simply tore apart and went spinning into space
suddenly there was only us
and the abyss of eternity . . .

I knew I would have you that night
we would collide like freight trains again
knowing moments after the magic
we would fight
knowing I would leave
half-naked
in the middle of the night

cursing you as I run barefoot to my car
swearing out loud as I navigate through my tears
SWEARING I will never EVER do this again
but right now I don't care
all I want is what was once between us

but suddenly you stop
you push me away
you push back your chair
and you are walking away
and it looks like you are. . .
are you
are you really
yes
you are
you are laughing
LAUGHING
not quite out loud
but it is undeniable
by the way you are grinning and your body is quivering
you are leaving and you are laughing
and finally I get it
this was your plan all along
your last hurrah
your final exit
to leave me wanting
and you fully in control
to have the last laugh
and the little bubbles rise and start to burst into giggles in the back
of my throat
and the giggles turn to laughter
subtle at first
but it grows like a wildfire
and suddenly bursts into an unstoppable guffaw
and I am laughing howling
right out loud
and all those people who had disintegrated are back
and staring at me
wondering
"What's the joke?"
not knowing
they are looking right at her

Ordinary Love

Amanda Udis-Kessler

It's Saturday morning. We make the bed, organize the clothes. There's a lot of laundry this weekend. We sort it to the classic jazz of KCME on the alarm clock radio. With three cats and a dog helping, the laundry takes even longer. We finally distract the dog with a chew toy while the cats wander off.

We sit down with recipe books and plan a shopping trip. Today, we'll walk the dog and then shop. When we're short on time, Phoebe walks Max, and I shop. It's a luxury to have the extra time.

Later, Phoebe will go into the office to work, and I'll go to the gym. We'll likely end the day with some Netflix, maybe old episodes of *MASH* or some *Deep Space Nine*. Phoebe introduced me to them, hooked me good.

It comes as a shock to remember that people think we are monsters, a threat to America. I try to forget for whole days at a time and sometimes, I succeed.

We go for Sunday brunch at Gertrude's. We talk about work and our families. I need to develop an order of service for the sermon I'll preach at the Pueblo church in a couple of weeks. I also brought some work home from my day job, but might not do it. Sunday night is always a challenge for us. We get the Sunday night blues, as we call them. Max and the cats are exceptionally cuddly tonight, bless them. I read to Phoebe, as I do most nights, to help her get to sleep. By the time I turn out the light, I'm ready for sleep myself.

I hear that an Oklahoma politician has compared homosexuality to cancer and LGBT people to terrorists. No, correction; we are more of a threat to society than terrorists.

I make Phoebe coffee as I do every morning. Mondays are usually insanely busy at work and today is no exception. It's almost lunchtime when I get through my email. I call Phoebe to see if she is free for lunch. She's not. I reluctantly eat at the student dining hall, work on some projects, arrange to bring one of the cats to the vet, agree to accompany the hymns at an area church the following Sunday, plan coffee with a friend. Monday evening is *Antique Road Show* for our household, so we try to have dinner ready by seven. I wash dishes and prepare tax materials for next week's meeting with our accountant. I pay some bills. The Oklahoma politician business has me depressed. Phoebe comforts me.

Last semester, a gay CC employee had "fag" scratched on his door, and a gay student I know was told he was a faggot. Well, he was called worse than that, but why bother to add the expletive?

Tuesday is the eighth anniversary of our commitment ceremony. Congratulating us, one straight friend remarks that she and her current husband have been married seven times all together. Why should their relationship be more okay than ours when we've been married only once (albeit not legally)? We go out for a fancy dinner but are careful not to be too affectionate near our car in case

someone decides to key it or slash the tires.

I know I shouldn't, but I pick up a copy of the Colorado Springs Gazette that's lying around a coffee shop. I turn to the Op-ed page. Big mistake. There we LGBT people are, strangers and dangers, according to one letter-writer. I get angry with myself. Why do I even bother to look?

Wednesday night, and it's dinner out with some friends who have a delightful young son. He enjoys Little Rabbit Foo-Foo so I do it over and over for him. I even scrounge up gospel and rock versions to amuse his father, who plays guitar. It occurs to me that I need to learn more games to play with toddlers, since we have several friends with young children and there are only so many variations on Rabbit Foo-Foo.

It's good to get quality time with our friends' children since I don't think we could adopt in Colorado, even if we wanted to. Apparently, we are bad for kids, too.

When we wake on Thursday, we see our oldest cat has gotten sick on the wood floor. He needs weekly hydration, which I've taught myself to provide. Today is a workday full of meetings, but somehow neither Phoebe nor I have a lunch meeting. We sneak away, grateful for the time together. Later, we discuss the impending visit of my father and stepmother, and decide we should take them to the zoo if the weather holds.

We live in a state that has a ban on same-sex marriage and a law against civil unions. Both laws were voted in at the same time. Can't be too careful, I guess.

Friday nights are usually as good as Sunday nights tend to be bad. For the first time in days, I open up the Spinet piano and play Billy Joel and other music Phoebe likes to sing. She sings melody and I harmonize. We order in Thai food, then go back to the piano. We watch a British mystery series while we eat. The dog goes after the leftovers while the cats play on their tower. We have almost a perfect life.

If only everyone else understood just how ordinary our love really is.

Billie

Susan

He sat down and started applying foundation, looking in the lighted mirror of the vanity. "If only Marty's Club had a lighted mirror like this," he thought. "Even if they did, still not enough room." The lack of space behind the stage was the reason he dressed at home. Yes, taking the bus caused stares. Being in public in drag is a worry. What if someone from work recognized Beth as Billy?

The CD switched tracks. "Damn." He listened to the song he would perform tonight. He didn't want to hear another until he had the words memorized. "I thought I had that on repeat." He finished the eyelash he was applying while trying to shut his ears. He got up with one eye as Beth, and one eye as Billy, to reset the CD player.

"Call me," the music boomed.

"Yea, right. Nobody'll call me, not even on a bet." Sitting back down, he started on the other eye. "Maybe I should do 'Looking for Love in All the Wrong Places,' but where else can a drag queen find love but in a gay bar? I never thought I'd be calling myself a drag queen. I'm a cross dresser, a transvestite, but a drag queen . . .never! Those people are weird. They're queers, faggots, strange." He stopped talking as he shaped his lips, but continued the thought. "Who knew I'd like men?"

As he finished his lips, he put a dress on and packed others in a small travel bag with his make-up case. "I did, I guess."

He checked Beth in the full-length mirror, grabbed his purse and bag and blew a kiss at his reflection. "You go, girl."

***

The door banged open as Beth pulled the tie off the cute guy and they landed on the bed.

"Damn, girl, give me a chance to unbutton it." Kevin tried to get his shirt off without tearing it, while simultaneously undressing Beth.

"You do mine and I'll do yours." Beth pulled Kevin's pants off and employed her mouth in a way Kevin found more interesting than talk.

"Now it's your turn," Kevin said. "But let's do the real thing."

"With me that's as real as it gets."

Kevin cupped her breasts. "No, there's more here."

Beth took his hand and put it on her crotch. "Actually, there's more here."

"What the hell?" Kevin shot off the bed.

"When you pick up a girl in a gay bar, what do you expect?" Billy tossed the rice bag falsie on the bed with the other one. "You can't have thought I was a real woman?" In the typically feminine contortionist manner, he took off the bra while leaving the shirt on.

Kevin started looking for his clothes. "I thought you were a woman."

Beth sat at his vanity and started wiping off make-up. "I thought you were a man."

"I am a man." Kevin found his pants but not his shorts.

"A gay man," Beth glared at Kevin through the mirror. "You didn't seem to mind my going down on you, just feeling me up."

"I don't even know your name."

"You know mine better than I know yours. I was introduced on stage."

"Not Beth. I mean your real name."

"If my name was William, and I told you to call me Billy, would that be my real name?" Clearing the make-up off, Billy applied night cream as he watched this strange man trying to find his clothes.

"That's a nickname." Kevin had found his shirt, but was still missing his shorts.

"And Beth isn't?"

"Oh, the hell with it." Kevin left his tie and shorts behind in his rush.

"Damn! Damn! Damn!" Billy as Beth slammed the cream onto the vanity. "Damn all men!"

***

On another night, the door banged open in a replay of events. "Not bad," Beth thought, as they landed on the bed.

"Damn, girl, give me a chance to unbutton it." Donny tried to keep his shirt from being torn.

"You do mine and I'll do yours." Beth pulled Donny's shirt off over his head. Once his arms were free, Beth continued to take care of Donny, the vague disquiet of their dialogue forgotten as he found Donny amiable to his manipulations.

***

"Oh, God, that was so much better," Beth sighed.

"Better than what?" Donny threw all the unclad clothes on the bed into a pile on the floor.

"Better than last time."

"This was our first time." He sat up looking for his jacket. "Cigarettes?"

"I meant my last time. He wasn't quite sure."

"Sure of what? The first time is always an experiment." Donny found his cigarettes and a lighter, and lit two, handing one to Beth.

"Sure he was gay."

"Oh, one of those."

Donny settled onto the bed with his back to the headboard and the ashtray in his lap. "If he wasn't sure he was gay, how was he doing you?"

Billy cupped his bra. "When the girls fell out, he leapt off the bed."

"He thought you were a real woman?"

Beth started to sort out the laundry pile on the floor and shrugged.

"Wow. For a drag queen to pass as a woman, that would be cool."

"Which are yours?" Billy asked, showing Donny the shorts. "I don't wear jockeys. The other pair probably belong to the guy we were talking about."

"I don't see any boxers." Donny looked at the spilled contents of the hamper strewn around the room.

"Maybe I am a woman. All my underwear is lingerie."

"Maybe you are," Donny said, reaching for her as Billy.

***

Elizabeth McKenzie ushered Billy into her therapy office. "You can call me Beth," she said. "What should I call you?"

"Didn't Donny give you my name?" Donny had set up the appointment.

"Of course, but William Miller isn't a name that fits this outfit." She gestured at the skirted suit that Donny had talked Beth into wearing.

"The outfit? Oh? Oh!"

"Your make-up is also quite good."

Billy's epiphany was complete. Donny loved her and wanted her to know.

She could not be Beth with Beth. "You can call me Billie."

an expression only manageable when alone

Aliya Mehdi

. . .until one night her legs folded, the paint spattered, her mouth
bent strangely into an expression only manageable when alone –
and she fell.
She fell through simulations of the dark
through the throats of elongated carnivals
through flower gardens who lead double lives
and woke up in the snow.
In life we were fixed, joined at the hip like mistaken sisters –
in death, we pile like riches at the palace gate, shivering, gasping
like fish because now we are able to breathe only dirt.
I met her, forgotten, in the corner mixing paint –
her face was veiled, soiled with the decaying twilight
her blood had turned to ash, had done so years ago
because of something she had seen as a child in a dark forest –
or something she ate.
She was quiet, her voice crumpled like smoke deep in her chest –
I drank it from her throat.
We spent three years lying on our backs
finding pictures in the plaster ceiling –
and then she went away.
She would still stand in the corner mixing paint
the twilight smeared across her face –
until one night her legs folded, the paint spattered, her mouth
bent strangely into an expression only manageable when alone.

Fireflies

Rebekah Shardy

Like Janis Ian, I had no sweaty-faced boy on the other end of the phone Friday nights conspiring for my freedom, no one but a father gone and not grieved, a childhood lost, and this pagan girl whose stolen, half-eaten apples I'd find in my yard. They say we never forget our first love. What if your first love died before it fully lived? Do you walk empty streets at night haunted by the ghost of possibility?

I recognized her as we do those we are meant to love: in a single moment. Regina and I sat doing homework at her parent's Victorian mahogany table and she told me of her rage at the butchery of her father's mower as it slaughtered a nest of rabbits hidden in their yard. We swore a sacred oath to never own absurd lawns, or to never cut their wildness. I knew we were formed of the same cloth, our bedroom dressers adorned with bird's eggs, snake skins, stones and feathers instead of lipsticks and eye shadows, compelled to build primitive altars in a world without refuge.

She brandished another side that smoked, trafficked in drugs and casual sex, although it was only to me that she entrusted the stories of her truth: singing French chansons to frogs on summer nights, riding her bike in the rain, her sudden flights of Shakespearean sonnets. While others snickered at the way she strode barefoot into chemistry lab to protest poisonous technology, I did not laugh. Perhaps we would grow old together, two fierce-eyed hags with cats in our laps, divining the purple future in midnight pieces of blueberry pie.

It was before Janis Ian came out, before country divas sang of kissing a girl, and I dare not think I was in love, yet when I left her side, I wrote for hours. I'd met my Muse and she whispered my secret name in a reddened ear. We finished playing tennis and she strode down my long yard, swinging her racket in the night, a constellation of glittering fireflies around her, my fairy queen. How right the heart felt, as if it slipped into place from a hard corner where it would have never stretched properly.

Parting for college, she studied for her masters in writing at Kent State, and then began restless and reckless hitchhiking, obsession with a stranger who did not love her, and, complete paranoia and self-destruction. In counterpoint, I became fixed as the North Star, sensible as an odometer, anchored with a family I had to support in faraway Colorado. When I opened her letters rambling with madness, I still cherished each flourish and each thing unsaid and expected to be understood. She said she knew she would die young. She knew herself to be bisexual, and would have liked to have children, but surrendered that possibility to worsening juvenile diabetes and encroaching blindness.

Her dream was to visit all fifty states before she died, and there was only one remaining. She left school and worked odd jobs to save for a final trip to Hawaii. Would I come with her to comb the beach for puka shells and hear our heartbeats in the surf?

I considered her invitation as I pushed the stroller with my grim-faced baby over frozen Colorado

curbs and knew the answer. She may as well have asked me to go with her to the moons of Jupiter. She died alone on the trip's return, her self-determined objective met. The day I received the call I was visiting a friend who showed me a secret place where hummingbird moths come out at dusk, sly and convincing under a conspiratorial moon. Was their message that death is also a trick and illusion? I dreamt that night of standing at the edge of black waters, keening like a wounded animal.

A decade later, I found that spot in Ohio. It was the place her parents cast her ashes, knowing, as I did, her heart's home in wilderness. It was the reservoir where she and I sometimes startled a dozing turtle and she courted frogs with French poetry. I threw a rose on the dark waves, the grassy beach around me starred by the wink and glimmer of fireflies, silent tribute to her magic.

The air is too cold here in Colorado on summer nights for that something absent amidst tidy lawns, pretty as practiced lies. I have been married for long years now, my boy the age I was when I first heard Regina's outrage for small and fragile things that want their freedom in the nest of earth's green heart. I miss that something. I miss fireflies.

Polyamorous

Matthew Baty

You have to understand the nature of the beast -
the way God created instinct.
Life is meant to be an abundant feast;
desire takes you to the brink.

We may not have much time together -
perhaps a moment or two.
It could be real or just whatever;
I'm leaving that choice up to you.

If there's one thing I know from experience -
don't ask for something that isn't yours.
Your mind can play tricks with your head;
getting hung up can be such a bore.

Life is a rich tapestry of experience -
so don't be sorry for your human nature.
The beast within rises and you can't change it;
Devil and God are drawn to each other.

Becoming Shade

SAGE (Jamie Cotton)

When I grow old
and small in thought
Will you brush the dust from my lips
on days I forget to speak
Lead my hands to your breasts
Swans swimming home
and label your body in Braille?

When I grow old
and strange like sin
Your eyes the only birds of my memory
Will you still call my body church
and pray allegiance to our crooked limbs?

When you grow old
and worn like wool
Your body will be my portal
a slender storm a stoic reef
sheltering
against Time's tide

When you grow old
and slender like moonlight
I will summon legions of angels
to watch your organs
on days I cannot
I will weave light from your memory
candles of thought heralding weather
I will wrap you in an avalanche of sky
to watch and wait
clouds adrift
like disaster
Night falls
like forever
as we wait
our lives unhinged
but not over

When we grow old
and death tries to come between us
We will stay very close and entangled
so death must leave
confused and unresolved
Then we will steal away
to the forest
Plant ourselves
an old knotted pine
and watch the flowers
in the shade
we have become

Parenting

Dear Mom and Dad

Dara Hoffman

Dear Mom and Dad,

This is a letter from thirteen-year-old me. It's a homework assignment from my therapist. Humor me while I make yet another courageous attempt at healing my inner child.

Thirteen- year-old me wants to grab you by the shoulders, look you in the eyes and burst out, "Please help me figure out that I am gay!" I want you to ask me why I am so deeply infatuated with my 8th grade English teacher. Lead me gently into a safe place so I may admit that, yes, the reason I shut myself in my room for an hour after school every day is to journal about my interactions, observations and wishes concerning this young woman. Do you not think it odd that I have her home phone number, ask her to come to dinner at our home twice, and that I stay after school just to have a few minutes of one-on-one with her?

Keep asking questions and I will admit that on our field trip to the Country Music Hall of Fame in Nashville, as I threw my lunch bag into a trash can and she threw away hers, I told her I loved her. I might tell you that when I sang "Every Breath You Take," in that cheesy "Be a Star!" booth at Dorney Park, I was thinking of her. I wrote her at least five letters a week when we moved, until she finally asked me to "Stop. Just stop."

Perhaps if you asked those questions I would not have been scarred so deeply by her inability to gauge what I was going through. Perhaps I would not have ended up "scared straight" for the next ten years, thanks to the humiliation I faced when I opened her last letter.

I know it's not a common question for a parent in 1988. "I don't know, honey – maybe you're actually a lesbian? That sure would explain a lot." There was no way you could have known that taking eight-year-old me in 1982 to see *Grease II* would be a monumental turning point in my pre-pubescent world. Michelle Pfeiffer in black leather pants, smacking gum, straddling a motorcycle. Too young to understand what was happening, I went to sleep dreaming of being her Cool Rider, holding hands with her, playing Ms. Pac-Man with her till the break of dawn. The crushes continue, even now, with almost every movie I see. *Footloose*? Lori Singer. *Bull Durham*? Susan Sarandon. *Clue*? Miss Scarlet. I don't know why I do it, but I do. Someone please see through me and tell me I am not a complete and total freak.

A lot of evidence was building over the years, don't you think? Some of it you didn't know. Being teased constantly about being a tomboy. Stalking the center halfback from my soccer team through school halls in the hope she would recognize me and offer up a "See you at practice, kiddo!" My keen ability to form crushes on both the guy and the girl in any couple at school. I spilled my guts to you about the guy, and conveniently left out the girl.

Some of it you did know. Star Wars' figures instead of Barbies. My obsession with Michael J.

Fox (I'm sure that's relevant somehow). Being freaked about Madonna. The woman exuded sexiness and I was absolutely unable to deal with my feelings for her so I pretended that I hated her. Stealing your *Penthouse* at age ten from your closet and carefully tearing out the girl-on-girl scenes to keep under my pillow. Yes, you did find that out, to my horror. I'm sorry, but the typical "Um, well, do you have any questions we can answer for you, dear?" response seems lacking in retrospect. At least you could have sent me to a child therapist so I could tell someone about this.

I felt so angry, confused and secretive. Only once, when I was nine, did I write these words in my diary: "I saw a girl at the park today and I think she was really cute." Moments after placing that on paper, I erased it in a wild frenzy. Then I taped a piece of notebook paper over the spot so I couldn't see even remnants of it. I thought I was crazy. I still do. I keep trying to get boys to like me but it just all . . .feels . . .so . . .hard.

Mom and Dad, this is your chance to let me know I am not the only one who feels this way. That you will still love me once you find out my weird thoughts. That maybe there are other kids out there who feel the way I do. I would really love that. Please help me. I really don't want to do this alone.

Your daughter,

D.

Clearly My Son

Rebekah Shardy

When my son was only ten, after learning about America's history of slavery and the slaughter of Native Americans, he said, "White people have been so mean. I don't want to be white. I want to be clear."

In 2002 B.C. (Before ComingOut), I asked him to drive me to work while my car was repaired. He was a senior in high school, riffing tales of high school ribaldry. I remember only the disdainful word he said his friends used to describe lesbians.

"Carpet-munchers, Mom."

"Carpet what?" My mind insisted he'd said 'carpet baggers.' Unscrupulous salesmen of the Old South? Understanding and laughter dawned. "Oh, Justin!"

A few years later, I prepared to tell my 20-year old son that I was divorcing his father because I had fallen in love with a woman. I was one of those. You know.

Dyke.

Lez.

Ballbuster.

Queer.

Peppermint Patty.

Turf grazer.

My light-eyed, bright-hearted young man was silent.

Would he understand? Had I lost him, too? Finally he spoke.

He called me a name. The one I deserve.

The one that sticks, endures. The one I accept.

The only one such a clear spirit could give me.

Oh, Mom.

Stand Up for Someone You Love

Judd Lynn

Fatherhood means different things to different fathers. To the fathers of gays, it has a special meaning, sometimes comfortable, sometimes not.

Jeanie and I have four children. We come from mainstream America and our kids grew up not suffering discrimination. There was no reason to be concerned about prejudice affecting their futures. It was simply up to us to make from life what we could. Then we got a wake-up call that things were not going to be that simple for our children, for us as a family and parents, and for me as a father. We learned we have a gay son, and a gay brother. Life would never be the same. Fathering would never be the same.

My reaction as a new father of a gay son could be described as ignorant, loving concern, with panic thrown in. As I regained my composure, I began to be concerned how our expectations had been shattered. I worried how to handle this new reality with friends. I worried about Chip's future. I wondered why.

I was adrift. As a father, you can usually relate to the events that occur in your kids' lives. Having a gay child was new turf, and I had no experience to which I could refer.

Fatherhood is an evolutionary process. Few fathers can say they are the same person at ages twenty, thirty, forty or fifty. It especially changes when grandfatherhood happens. Fathers of gays have a special element to their evolution. In my case, it was a crash course in learning about new-to-me realities, and expanding my ability to understand and accept. It became a new and challenging opportunity to stand up for someone I love. The truth is, we all have lots of cultural bias built in, and it affects us. Some of us deal with it, some not. It can be intimidating.

There is a sterling silver lining. I am very proud of my children. Just as any parent would be proud of children that have overcome obstacles. I am especially proud of my gay son. I am proud of my wife and myself for the way we have grown and are interested in improving the gay environment for future generations.

"Pride Day" is for Dad, too. It is never too late. A father of a gay person can come out of the closet any time and find a welcoming heart, not only from the gay child, but the entire family.

If you are the parent of a gay child, and you know you have not been as supportive as you could be, take the plunge. The rewards are unending. You will rewrite the book on the meaning of Father's Day in your life.

The Visit

James F. Miller

Mrs. Clarence Davis sat at her breakfast table drinking her morning tea. She looked out the window to see a robin on her mulberry tree. The signs of spring were everywhere.

She patiently waited for the ringing of the doorbell and the Army representative who would be visiting her to offer condolences on the loss of her son to the Iraq war. During World War II, they sent telegrams, but now they had soldiers trained and assigned to visit the grieving parents, spouse or family.

Although the soldier would bring a Silver Star and Purple Heart for his bravery in the line of duty, it was little consolation for the loss of her only child.

The doorbell rang, and she slowly moved from the kitchen and opened the door.

"Hello. I am Private Mike Rost. I'm here to offer the Army's deepest condolences on the loss of your son. May I come in for a few moments?"

"Certainly." She noticed the satchel under his arm, which she assumed contained the medals and, hopefully, some personal items of her son.

"I can make some coffee," she said as she moved toward the kitchen. "Or I have iced tea."

"No, thank you, ma'am."

"Well, have a seat at the kitchen table." Mrs. Davis lifted the teapot and poured herself more hot tea. "I suppose you don't drink hot tea, do you?"

"No, ma'am."

"Most men don't, I guess."

"He was in my platoon, Mrs. Davis. He was a very brave soldier. Sadly, I was there when he was killed."

"I'd really like to know what happened, if you would tell me."

"Actually, he wanted to go ahead of the platoon to check for possible enemy occupation of a building. By doing so, he saved the rest of us. He always put others first, Mrs. Davis. I'm not making that up."

"Oh, he was always that way. Very sensitive to the needs of others. Very unlike his father. His father died in the war, but then they didn't send people in person. His father would have been surprised that Bobby wanted to join the Army."

"Yes, ma'am. He wanted to be an artist. Always loved animals. Actually very shy."

"Did you know he was gay?" Mrs. Davis asked hesitantly.

"No, ma'am."

"They had that 'don't ask, don't tell' thing. But I guess if anyone knew, he would get kicked out, right?"

"I wouldn't know, ma'am. But I'm sure there are other gays in the military, from what I've heard.

Your son was, as far as I'm concerned, a real man when it came to bravery and looking after others, Mrs. Davis."

"That's very kind of you to say. He wanted to serve his country. I knew he couldn't be talked out of it, so I didn't try. But I didn't want him to go. I knew that would be selfish of me. I wanted him to pursue his art and I had already lost my husband. I wanted him to be happy. I hope what he did made him happy. Do you think it did?"

"Yes, ma'am, he seemed to be."

"I always hoped he'd find someone to share his life with."

"I believe he was the type of person that deserved someone, Mrs. Davis."

"That's very nice of you to say, considering his sexual orientation." She asked hopefully, "Did you bring anything personal?"

Private Rost slowly lifted the satchel that he placed by the chair at the dining room table and opened it.

"There is a picture of you and him together, standing in front of the house. He was wearing his Little League uniform. Also, I have two medals here. Would you like to see them?" Private Rost started to open them, but Mrs. Davis put her hand on his.

"That's fine. Just tell me which one is the Purple Heart."

"This one in the velvet case."

"I'd like you to keep it."

"I couldn't, it wouldn't be appropriate, I'm not family," he said quickly.

"You were in his platoon. You spent the last days of his life with him. Please, it would mean a lot to me if you did." She placed both hands on Private Rost's and looked him earnestly in the eye.

"Mrs. Davis, I. . ."

"Please. . ."

He slowly placed the velvet case in the satchel and stood. She knew intuitively he wanted to leave, walked him to the door and hugged him good-bye.

"Thank you, Private Rost. You don't know what your visit has meant to me."

After the door closed, she stood at the window and watched Private Rost on the front porch, tears falling down his cheeks. He reached in his back pocket and pulled out his wallet. He took out a picture of Bobby and him with their arms around each other.

She didn't really understand that kind of love, but she knew one thing.

For a brief while, in his own private way, her son had found someone and his own kind of happiness.

Spirituality

Two-Spirited (Winkde)

(from "The Spirit Beneath the Skin")

Cante Mato

I attended church with my family every Sunday, as well as Bible School and Bible Camps, later participating in their youth group. There were a few deacons in my family, including my mother, unaware her only son was visiting the church when everyone was absent.

Our church was located in the field behind the home of cousins, a field where we often played. I might catch the glint of light off stained glass, or witness the reflection of a bird on the back windows of the church, just out of my field of perception, thinking God was watching me play, waiting for me to come inside. I overcame my fear and began sneaking in, feeling I had been invited over to peer at the mysteries of the source. I'd fling open closets and cupboards, peer under pews, and search the basement in the dim light, thinking I might surprise the ghost of Peter or some miscellaneous disciple. Perhaps I might hear a moaning Judas, or round a corner and bump into Jesus. But in all the time I went alone, I never once encountered anything of a paranormal nature, which greatly disappointed me. After all my work and studies to earn my own personalized, gilded copy of the Bible, after all my questions and prayer regarding my hidden nature, not once did I receive an answer, not realizing I already had it.

From the pages of my heavy new Bible, I'd find myself reading a passage time and time again, the infamous line from Leviticus which states, "man shall not lie with man," another religious oddity I found disappointing. How could this be, when I felt it to be the most natural, instinctive thing in the world? Did men not feel great love for each other?

I was also beginning to question the beliefs of our congregation, having continually come up empty-handed on my secret excursions to the church. I couldn't understand why we needed to visit a special building, or allow a particular man to provide us with access to God, when He was omnipotent and said to be everywhere. I remembered the stories of my grandfather, who spoke of being physically abused when he was caught speaking our Native American language at the Boys' School he attended. The white man bent him into something they believed was much better, forced him to adopt their God, religion and practices. He became a priest, and I longed to ask him if he was happy, if the Great Spirit ever spoke to him again, and if Jesus was ignoring him, too.

I wanted direct contact with the divine, needing to know why I was the way I was. I began to feel the essence of that mysterious source in nature. I saw it in extended, carnival, gypsy twilights, that gave way to sunsets that seemed reflections of heaven. It was at that place between day and night, where two worlds were in balance, when the first star of evening appeared. I knew I contained such balance, holding both the energies of the male and female within me.

In that revelation, I saw a compelling wink from a universe I sensed to be entirely conscious, full of great humor and beauty, most aware of my appreciation for it. In gratitude, I felt special and

blessed on my path through this earth. This divine energy felt greater than anything I had experienced in church. I was moving toward a higher truth, a glimpse of what God was, as well as a deep sense that He knew what I was too, and found it just as beautiful.

I remember the first time I saw the Milky Way, the vast, glowing cloud of concentrated stars stretched out across a broad night canvas. I dropped to my knees in humility at the sheer beauty of creation, momentous wonder brimming inside me. That was God, casting soft starlight on me from space.

Then one morning at Sunday school, our teacher passed around a box of old nails. She instructed us to push them into our palms without breaking the skin. But she did, and as she stood there with tears streaming down her face, and blood pooling in her palms, she looked at us with both sorrow and rage.

"Look what He did for you!"

And that was it for me. I began attending on holidays only. My deepest questions remained unanswered by a church unequipped to assist me with my particular problem. A terrific longing set in. Would God still hear me? Would I still be saved? How does one turn his feelings off? Would I never meet someone like me? Am I really going to hell for this?

Eventually, I began to feel as if I were communicating with what I simply deemed "the universe," having awakened from a dream one morning, repeating the words, "I am the universe," over and over.

As an adult, I studied esoteric works and various Native American texts about what my Sioux tribe called the Winkde. These were the walkers between two worlds. They had the essence of both sexes within them. They were a special, sacred part of the tribes, privileged and honored to hold such energy in balance. I discovered indigenous cultures all over the world had their own tales of such people. No one interfered with them. They were believed to have been given a special gift by the Creator.

I could exist as a walker between two worlds.

In following this path, I found work managing a metaphysical shop. It was here I met my first transgendered friend, a male spirit in the body of a female, who was finding difficulty expressing his truth in the physical. He led me to give lectures on the Winkde.

I have learned to embrace our mysteries. I still walk between two worlds that perpetually confuse, challenge and inform me. I have learned to hold the balance to keep my vision of a world and people that are still evolving and finding their own meaning. I can view things with a symbolic perspective, without wearing the symbols. I can have a husband, and yet, when my sexual preference is questioned, I can simply, jokingly say, "Often."

When I hear ignorant remarks such as, "That's so gay," or find myself disgusted with exaggerated caricatures in the media, I allow myself to think of that deep twilight we've all come from, dream from, and struggle to get back to.

That dusk place always calling our attention, always asking us to look deeper, beyond the strange, beneath the skin.

If Jesus Was A Woman

Group poem by members of the GLBT writing group, "OutWord"

On her last day on earth,
She astounded everyone.
She multi-tasked, of course, kicked serious butt, resurrected the
slashed, burned trees of the Amazon, made dinner and love
to her husband. Inspired by holy example, men started to do laundry.
She walked among us and through her eyes and touch
we surrendered to a depth of love we'd never felt before.
Bigotry ended and love was born, releasing the child
knotted into fear's fetal position. All stood free.
She bled truth,
leapt off the cross and used the wood to build a house
for a poor family, told the secrets of life and death, sang until those who forgot
how to listen remembered and communicated truthfully.

Armies fell in love with Her and dropped their weapons forever.
She became us and we became Her. Anorexic young women woke
lusting for fudge and round plush thighs. Health insurance companies closed
as she taught illness results from unhappiness. Walls of hierarchy tumbled.
Gaia spoke directly to us. We realized we could do without driving.
She was one of us. Not a King of Kings - but a Sister, a Lover,
a Mother and Friend who moved us from external authority
to the internal, eternal wisdom of the heart. And when She was done,
She laughed and laughed and laughed.
Jesus as Woman, God as us:
She is coming
She never left
She's here.

To be King of Israel: Jonathan and David

Excerpt from the play of the same title

Malachi Truman Harris

DAVID: You are twice more my friend than brother-kin.
I am upset that marriage interrupts.
The wedding bed makes future kings, but can't
Replace our love. It is beyond a throne,
A king, a wife. We are our paradise
Surpassing all the love that women give.
You are my everything, my all, my life.
A thousand wives could not supplant our love
Which will not end until my life is done.

JONATHAN: Our love shall outlive us in timelessness
We have distilled an instant of forever.

DAVID: My never-dying thirst for you, insatiable.

JONATHAN: David, I desire you in my father's house
Seek after you among the olive trees
Whose fruit is ripe for harvesting.
You are the morning dew, refreshes me,
Before me cast aside your garment's shield
And let me view the all of you unmask'd.
You are magnificent, a feast of grace.
We breathe and splash love's rivers on each.
We sprinkle us throughout unnumbered worlds.
Caress my hurts, entrance me, sing me songs!
Embrace me as I kiss your soft lush lips!

DAVID: You are my friend, my love, my god! You are
More beautiful than all the cedars grown
In Lebanon! You are my cherished jewel!
I love you more than I love women, Jon!

DAVID CALLS THE PEOPLE OF JUDAH OUTSIDE OF HIS HOUSE AT ZIKLAG TO TELL THEM OF SAUL'S DEATH

DAVID: I have official word, the war has failed!
Our first king, Saul, is slain, as are his sons!
Their lives were lost in battle with the Philistines!
Our nation faces vast catastrophes.
I mourn for Saul, my second father, and
For Jonathan, more precious than a brother:
My love for him, surpassing women's love!

. . . from the blood of the slain, from the fat
of the mighty, the bow of Jonathan turned not
back and the sword of Saul returned not empty.
... they were swifter than eagles, stronger than lions.

LATER AT THE PALACE GATE A CROWD GATHERS TO HEAR WHO WILL BE KING OF ISRAEL:

DAVID: Israel shall be my footstool as I am the footstool
Of our Yahweh God! . . . I shall take up the weighted crown,
shall wear the armband wrought in gold, and rule with
care. Yawheh is our God - - we cannot fail! Yet I would
not have chosen me
To be the king. I am what I am! I am that I am!
And, that I am, I cannot change, nor would I try!
Hear, Judah! Knowing this, accepting this,
I'll sit upon your throne as second king!

DAVID TURNS UPSTAGE AND EXITS, ARM IN ARM WITH NATHAN AS TRUMPETS BLARE, TAMBOURINES SOUND. LIGHT FADE TO BLACK.

Preacher Man

Clinton Nicholson

It is time my brothers and sisters
for change. It is time
my brothers and sisters for
redemption. It is time, my brothers and sisters
for the resurrection. It is time, my brothers and sisters for
the righteous to regain
their place in the Kingdom
of the Almighty Creator

It is time to send the blasphemers of
His Name
His Power
His Glory
back into the mouth of the Beast with its poisonous lies that
paralyze
cripple
and blind the heart of humanity.

It is time to end
our persecution,
our suffering
our struggle.
We are the Children of God chosen by His Son to inherit this earth
the outcasts
the misfits
the accused heretics.

But it is they who
fill His Churches
who line His pews
who pray in His name that are the true proprietors of evil.
No longer, my brothers and sisters,
will they oppress us.
No longer, my brothers and sisters,
Will they ignore us.

No longer, brothers and sisters,
will they deface our lives
our hearts
our faith.
The fires of Armageddon rage inside each of us
and the angels of heaven are armed for our war.
The time is now, brothers and sisters!

Salvation is upon us!

Christian Love for All

Rev. Wes Mullins, Pikes Peak Metropolitan Community Church

"It was as if an impenetrable wall suddenly and miraculously vanished."

When a GLBT person comes through the doors of Pikes Peak Metropolitan Community Church, Christian love is often felt in a new and profound way. One person said, "When I finally came to a church that loved me for who I was, I also experienced for the first time a God who loves me for who I am."

Barriers come down in this church. Healing occurs. Self-esteem dramatically returns to the marginalized children of God who have been hurt by guilt-and-shame-based religious teaching. People are freed to pursue the spiritual life, and the relationship with God they have always wanted. When obstacles to God are removed, amazing things happen in people's lives.

I experienced that amazing grace when I first walked into the doors of an MCC church on February 3, 2003. I was a seminary student in Abilene, Texas, and went to MCC to prove the church was a group of hypocrites that knew nothing of God. Instead, I encountered overwhelming love and grace, so much that I spent the entire service in tears in the back pew. I wasn't the first such visitor, and the people of the church came to me, sat with me, and cared for me as they had been cared for when they first attended.

At the time, I had just left my reparative therapy program, designed to change my sexuality. Such a change was not possible. I knew I was gay; equally, I believed in God. I had been trying to reconcile the two. Over the course of the next year, I did. I devoured texts from both sides of this great moral debate of our time and talked to religious leaders of various perspectives. I came to realize that gay and Christian were not mutually exclusive. Where did I find the greatest proof of this? Not in a book. Nor did I find it in debates on *Oprah* or *CNN*. The greatest proof was in the lives of GLBT Christians. I saw Jesus' love and compassion in them – their deep spirituality as they sought love, justice and hope for our world.

Their sexuality didn't make them evil, perverse or dirty. It opened up a way for them to enact a radically honest form of spirituality defined by unabashed integrity and love for God.

Elizabeth and Sandra are a perfect example. The two have been together fifteen years, and have a son, Bailey, conceived with the help of an anonymous donor. He is that perfect church kid. Everyone adopted him from the moment he arrived in this world and celebrated each year of his life as he grew into a small boy, and then a young man. His parents have raised Bailey in their footsteps – to be a leader in the church, a person of deep faith.

Elizabeth and Sandra also spend their time helping others outside the church. One is a nurse, and the other runs a treatment facility for those suffering from eating disorders. Their lives are devoted to loving others and helping those in need to find hope and a way to love themselves. They are a remarkable couple making a profound, yet rarely lauded, effect on our world. I am grate-

ful for the way their lives testify to the power of Jesus, and the love of God at work in the lives of GLBT people.

The Church went askew. Jesus left his message, "Love to the point that you even love your enemies (Matthew 5:43-48)." But what is the sad state of the Christian world? We made the Christian faith about which denomination had it right, who was doing the right things to get to heaven. What if church was about setting aside our differences?

What if worship was a time when the lion and the lamb sat in the pew next to each other and showed one another love? How much more like Christ would we be if we showed grace and mercy to those who are most different from us, and the hardest to love?

This is the Christian unity for which Jesus prayed, the kind of unity that we, at Pikes Peak MCC, pray for. It is the reason this church, once known as the "gay church," is expanding to represent people of all sexual orientations, ages, genders, and religious beliefs.

This rise of those seeking Christian unity gives me hope for tomorrow, for our children, and for the return of Jesus.

***

Located at 1102 S. 21st Street in Colorado Springs, MCC believes that the love of God and the ministry of Jesus teach that all are welcome at the table of the Divine. Members come together to create a more loving, peaceful and just world. See www.ppmcc.org, call (719) 634-3771 and/or refer to "GLBT Community Resources" in this book for more information.

Change My World

Lucinda T. Green

In 1984, my world was coming to an end. "I want out," my partner of six years said. She not only shared my bed, but we also meditated and did yoga daily, were politically active together, traveled in the same social circles and conducted long philosophical discussions. What was I to do?

I had something to celebrate amidst devastating loss. The ink barely dry on my PhD dissertation, degree in hand, I had a major reward in mind. Many might go to the Bahamas to sit on a beach and sip Mai-Tais.

I chose to enter a Buddhist nunnery in Sri Lanka.

I was born to meditate. I began at age sixteen, and lived and studied in India when I was nineteen and twenty as part of my undergraduate degree. During my doctoral studies, I met a German woman, Buddhist nun and teacher, Ayya Khema. The government of Sri Lanka gave her a small island upon which to build a nunnery. Her intent was to recreate monastic life as it was lived at the time of the Buddha. She invited women all over the world to join her. Relationship torn asunder, my bags were packed.

Flo, a Buddhist friend, came along to Nun's Island to share my adventure. There were two levels of nuns (anagarikas) there: women on eight vows (precepts), and those on ten. Nuns on ten precepts make a three-year commitment to study with Ayya, and enjoyed simple stucco cottages (kutis) with tiled roofs on the eastern side of the island. Flo and I were eight precept nuns. We set up our humble abode on the veranda outside the library.

I was happy with the lodgings. We each had a kerosene lantern (there was no electricity on the island), a small wooden box in which to put our white robes and work clothes, and a plain wooden bed with cork mattress encased in muslin.

Warm breezes ruffled the two terracotta-colored curtains that delineated our sleeping area from the veranda. I preferred the open air of the veranda to the library, an extraordinary source of canonical texts and commentaries that doubled as a dark and musky dormitory for five British, Dutch, German and Australian women.

One morning, on our weekly day of silence, Flo packed up her meager belongings.

"What's going on?" I whispered.

"I can't stand all the noise coming from the library. Ayya is letting me move into a kuti."

Flo was leaving and I could not talk to her about it during silence. By noon, she was gone. I sobbed uncontrollably, gasping for breath between tidal waves of tears. A familiar voice echoed in my brain, "I have no choice, yet it affects me deeply!" When I stopped long enough to catch my breath, I realized my volcanic outburst was out of proportion. I realize this was about my former lover, the one who left me.

As I sought guidance from Ayya, relaying my distress at Flo's unexpected move, my whole body quivered.

"Oh," Ayya responded. "You are equating change with loss. Simply look at change as change. With Flo gone, what has the space changed into? Consider what the room was before it was a room."

"It was a veranda," I replied.

"And what was it before it was a veranda?"

"It was raw land, covered with bushes," I surmised.

"Look at all events as processes of change and do not equate them with loss. Always discover what they have changed into." Inside my head, I heard a voice protesting, "but there is loss in change." I remained mute as I listened to my teacher.

"There is constant movement and change in life. Pay attention to the rhythm of change and do not attach yourself to the rhythm. Simply be with this rhythm and allow things to unfold as they are, seeing change for what it is."

I made my way back slowly to the far side of the island, lost in thought as I turned Ayya's words over in my mind. At the highest point on the tiny, two-acre island, I stopped and gazed out at the surrounding water. The late afternoon sun created a swathe of shimmering golden light.

I noticed. There was a new space in my heart.

Earth and Sky

John Robey

Mother Earth and Father Sky
Danse a dance above so high
Gentle breezes coo and sigh
to show us where the truth doth lie.
Singing, spinning, 'round in bliss
Day by day, the two do kiss.
Father Sky and Mother Earth
Each day bring another birth.

Father Earth and Mother Sky
Each day teach the birds to fly.
Father Earth loves Mother Sky
and sends his leaves into the sky.
Mother Sky, Mother Sky,
Father Earth, Father Earth,
learn to fly and learn
to learn.

Mother Earth and Mother Sky
Sing a merry lullaby
As the Earth spins 'round the sun
Happy joy is now begun.
Boddhisavattas like Quan Yin
Say "Let the merry danse begin."
Mother Earth and Mother Sky
Sing a merry lullaby.

Father Earth and Father Sky
How I too would wish to fly
Mating through electric bonds
And water clear and water dear
Flow your tears into the sands
Renew and recreate new lands
Let your union harmonize
Show us where the truth now lies.

Return to the Goddess

Anonymous

A medieval rabbi wrote that the Shekinah (the female aspect of the Creator) "may be found wherever apple trees are in bloom." I found Her there.

As a teen, I lived near an abandoned apple orchard, full of sleepy mourning doves and abuzz with bees drunk on overripe fruit. A single gust set off a blizzard of white blossoms in a storm of perfume. In autumn, on the way home from school, I curled up in a bed of its spicy leaves, dreaming of golden light and unicorns.

The orchard was one way the Goddess called me to lost innocence and wildness, my soul's nostalgia for Her magic. The love of women was another.

Too soon, the grove of apple trees was bulldozed to make way for more tickytack suburban houses displaying Thomas Kinkade calendars and other kitsch in lieu of authentic beauty. But I am made of stronger stuff.

I was raised in angry Protestant Christianity full of blame, shame and holy terror, interrupted by short bouts of narcissistic faith that we alone might avoid hell. The church leader disliked my mother, calling her a witch for her free-spirited laughter and love of life. She was the daughter of a midwife who healed the sick with herbal medicines and spoken words, soothing nasty burns into seamless flesh.

My mother led our family out of the harsh Christian sect, and encouraged my intuitions and art, teaching me to listen to held rocks and standing trees. I converted to Catholicism, and she joined me. She became a mystic, reading the lives of martyrs and seeing visions of Jesus, while I toyed with becoming a nun dedicated to social justice.

We promised to tell the other what death was like when the time came. A few minutes after she expired at 4 a.m., a phone without an outside line in the nursing home rang and rang. I picked up the receiver to hear silence, again and again, her vow to me realized.

My mother's gifts of knowing and feeling became my empathy and prophetic dreams. Buried by work, marriage and a young child, I had what Jung called a "big dream:"

I am painting the image of the Goddess Aphrodite in Botticelli's "Birth of Venus" and the image of the Goddess comes alive - - huge, radiantly beautiful, and more real than me. She is floating before me. We are both high above the earth. Below us, a line of women wind their way across an island toward the sea. I am looking into the Goddess' luminous eyes and they are full of wisdom, compassion and indescribable bliss.

When I woke, I was changed. Was the dream a memory of a past life as a worshipper in ancient Greece? I pushed such ancient instincts, with my fantasies and crushes on women, into the back of my patient heart while I dutifully served my family. In small ways, I honored the Goddess, cleaning local creeks on Sunday morning as my expression of tithing. She certainly did not forget me.

She inspired my writing and, incredibly, I won a scholarship to stay at a Women's Writing Retreat on the birch-lined shore of Lake Superior. It was there that I ate my first mango, slept under a quilt inscribed with the words of a black lesbian poet, and lazily perused shelves of books by and about women, surrounded by beloved wilderness and Goddess and animal art.

When my son was raised, it was a woman who called me to my deferred passion - - a woman of the sacred earth, Native American, and an artist. Our matchmaker was a phenomenal electrical storm that chased us into the quiet warmth of a horse's tack shed. We laughed, holding hands as we tottered across Platte River. I was awed in bed to hear her sing - a Mohawk tradition - at winter's first snow. I taught her to lie in autumn beneath great cottonwood trees and make wishes as we caught tumbling leaves.

I'm not a witch. I don't make spells or belong to a coven. I believe in God without gender – Great Spirit, Creator, All-in-All – but for me, the Divine wears the secret soft face of Woman, and offers the protective devotion of a Mother.

I am Her daughter, lover and disciple, making acts of beauty with words, and performing service to women who are oppressed and exhausted by life.

She led me to three loves – wilderness, women and words.

These words are for Her.

Contributor Biographies

Matthew Baty is the author of "Polyamorous."

Laurie Wagner Buyer, poet (*Glass-eyed Paint, Red Colt Canyon*), novelist (*Side Canyons*) and writing instructor provided expert editing of the *Colors of Courage*. She has won numerous grants and awards, including the Colorado Council on the Arts Literature Artist Fellowship, and has an MFA from Goddard College. She mentors and edits writers through Creative Adventures: A Guide Service for Writers at www.lauriewagnerbuyer.com.

Laura Colbert is the author of "Where is was Considered Normal" and "Rainbow Bracelet with a Different Bead." She is a former computer programmer, current hardwood floor installer, and future sculptor. She lives with her partner and son in the country and volunteers at the Pride Center.

Kathy Conarro provided lay-out and design of the *Colors of Courage*. She is the art director at the *Colorado Springs Independent*.

Todd W. Craig is the author of "150 Eighth Graders." He writes, "At 37 years old, and in perfect health, I wrangle eighth-graders in my English classroom at Cheyenne Mountain Junior High School. I am hopelessly devoted to my hottie husband, AJ, and our beautiful son, Joshua. My hobbies include paying bills, making lame jokes and eating chocolate chip cookies."

Margaret Duncombe is the author of "Thank You, Harvey Milk." She is retired from the Sociology Department and the Feminist and Gender Studies Program at Colorado College. She served on the Pride Center Board during the Amendment 2 brouhaha and subsequently served on the Board of Citizens Project. She lives with her partner of forty years in Colorado Springs.

Lucinda T. Green, is the author of "Change My World." She is a Dharma teacher and founder of Rocky Mountain Insight (www.rockymountaininsight.org), a Buddhist Meditation Center in Colorado Springs offering weekly meditation groups, instruction and classes. She is also available for mind-body integrative psychotherapy sessions (719-634-0566).

Malachi Truman Harris is the author of "To Be King of Israel: Jonathan and David "(play exerpt). He is a poet, playwright, actor, and a political activist since crossing a picket line in 1953. He is one of four founders of the Gay Liberation Front in Colorado Springs and says, "The struggle is never over. No one is free until we are all free."

Ric Helstrom photographed the art featured in and on the covers of *Colors of Courage*. Helstrom Studios a commerical photography & graphic design studio has be serving the Pikes Peak region for over 30 years. Providing creative & quality service from business cards, promotional post-cards, logo designs to brochures and catalogs. "We want to make you look as good as you really are." Helstrom Studios 2506 Robinson St. Colorado Springs, CO 80904 719-473-3620.

Dara Hoffman is the author of "Dear Mom and Dad." She practices as a mental health counselor in Colorado Springs, and specializes in working with the GLBT community.

Bob K. is the author of "The Hall Closet." Born in Colorado and presently living in Colorado Springs, he was married to a wonderful woman and raising terrific children when he realized even the best closet existence isn't a substitute for life. In his mid-40's he decided to live as an openly gay man.

William Knapp painted "Heaven and Earth: A Vision" on the back cover. He began painting when he was eleven years old, and has risen above the challenges of mental illness to make stunning art depicting outer and inner space. To inquire about his work, please contact him via Ryan@YourPrideCenter.org. Purchase of his unique work provides supplies for continuation of his art.

Laura is the author of "An Authentic Journey," and "Alibi." A resident of Colorado Springs since 2001, she works in higher education, spends time her with family and dogs, and enjoys reading, gardening, dancing, and the creative process.

Anna Lavender (pen name) is the author of "Outed by A Kiss." She has been through the fire and out the other side. Born in 1945, she grew up being the "best little good girl." This story tells the beginning of her journey to authenticity and truth. Anna lives blissfully with the ladylove of her life in Colorado Springs.

Judd Lynn is the author of "Stand Up for Someone You Love." He writes, "It was in California that our son came out to us, but in Colorado Springs we found Parents and Friends of Lesbians and Gays (PFLAG). These were the days of Colorado's Amendment 2. As always when you devote yourself to the good of others, you gain more than you give."

C. Dana Martyne (pen name) is the author of "A Double Life," and "I Explore My Love." She writes, "I was born in California and moved to Colorado as a teenager. I was married for over forty years when my husband died. I have two sons and several grandchildren. I worked in a library for several years, became a freelance writer 25 years ago, and currently teach yoga."

Cante Mato (Ogalala Sioux for Bear Heart) is author of "Secret Thoughts in Coded Language," "Illumination" and "Two Spirited," excerpted from "The Spirit Beneath the Skin." He is currently featured on the Sci-Fi Channel and Star Wars websites. His writing, acting and filmmaking projects involve spirituality and consciousness-raising through synchronicity, dreams and the supernatural. He lives with his mate in Colorado Springs and at www.myspace.com/epicanthic.

Hayden Matthews is the author of "Untitled I" and "Untitled II." He is 18 years old and pursuing college to study social work and business management. He began writing at a very young age and continues to write in order to share his experiences as a transgender youth who is part of the GLBT community.

Aliya Mehdi is the author of "an expression only manageable when alone." She is a writer by vocation. She writes poetry and is working on her second novel. She also enjoys visual art, reading, and performance poetry.

James F. Miller is the author of "Coming Out to Play," "I'd Run a Pink Light for You Baby" and "The Visit." He is a freelance fiction and feature writer, photographer and painter. His written works have appeared in The Chicago Tribune, US, and People. His artwork has been shown in several Colorado Springs galleries, and his fiction and poetry in numerous anthologies and magazines.

Rev. Wes Mullins is the author of "Christian Love for All." Valedictory graduate of Brite Divinity School in Fort Worth, he was unanimously elected as Senior Pastor of Metropolitan Community Church (MCC) in Colorado Springs after serving congregations in Tennessee, Georgia, Florida, Texas, and Oregon. He values authentic living most, saying, "Your God can only be as real as you are."

Clinton Nicholson is the author of "Preacher Man." He was born in Anchorage, Alaska, into a third generation military family. Raised in Colorado Springs, he and his longtime partner still reside in the beautiful and conservative city that remains a constant inspiration to his writing.

Sally Piette provided lay-out and design of the *Colors of Courage*. She is a graphic designer with the *Colorado Springs Independent*. Sally is also a freelance designer and painter. She lives in Old Colorado City with her pulchritudinous girlfriend and their two cats, Finn and George.

Steven P. Rinkes is the author of "Chance Meeting." Raised in Tampa, Florida, he is currently working on a crime novel titled, *Straight Agenda*.

John Robey is the author of "Outside Looking In," and "Earth and Sky." He writes, "I consider myself a 'Sunday painter' writer, writing only when I feel inspired, most often poetry and the occa-

sional essay shared for free. My essay tells my values and who I am better than any list of achievements or awards."

SAGE (Jamie Cotton) is the author of "Derailed," and "Becoming Shade." She describes herself as a "hopeless romantic becoming hopeful again, beauty addict, soul diver, big heart in search of things to love, poignant poet, laughingoutloudist, dork, sunlover, sensualist, impossible dreamer, spiritual spelunker, restless do-gooder, relentless life-lover, social evolutionist, sussing out a current growing spurt and creating what's next."

Kory Sampson is the author of "The Internet is Good for Just About Anything." Kory is twenty-one, pursuing a degree in Sociology and raising one-year-old Vincent with fiancé Talia. He works at Inside/Out and serves on its Board of Directors. Kory hopes to open a nonprofit to help homeless GLBT youth, and a fund to assist transgender persons with the costs of physical transition.

Rebekah Shardy is author of "Fireflies"and "Clearly My Son." Author of *98 Things A Woman Should Do in Her Lifetime* (Andrews McMeel), she received the Pikes Peak Arts Council's Community-Building Award for The Mighty Muse Writing Project for Women. She is publisher/chief editor for the *Colors of Courage* and creator of the *Scarlet: Liberal Journal for the Arts* website.

Susan is the author of "Billie." She writes, "I'm an Air Force brat who worked as a ranch hand in South America upon high school graduation. I joined the Army to finish paying for college. I spent twenty-two years in the military, retiring as an NCO. With my BA in Mathematics, I teach now."

Squirrel created the art for the cover of this anthology and says his art speaks for itself.

Amanda Udis-Kessler is the author of "Ordinary Love." She is a writer, musician, sociologist, lay preacher and college administrator. Her first book, *Queer Inclusion in the United Methodist Church*, was published by Routledge in Spring 2008. She can be reached at amandaudiskessler@gmail.com.

Dorian Beth Wenzel is the author of "Why Gay Pride?" A local gay writer and professional photographer, she was awarded "Volunteer of the Year" in 2005 by the Pikes Peak Gay and Lesbian Community Center and is author of the lesbian fiction series, *Adventures of a GWF.*

Nan C. Wilson is the author of "After." She writes, "I taught high school for twenty-eight years and have recently retired to pursue writing and other interests. My passion for writing began in childhood while entertaining captive younger brothers with my stories. After years of 'Someday...' I'm finally able to write with the focus I've craved."

GLBT COMMUNITY RESOURCES

Pikes Peak Gay & Lesbian Community - Your GLBT Pride Center since 1978

Your Pride Center - Be Free. Be You!

Are you a member of the Pride Center? If you believe all families should be able to protect their spouses and children, and that all people should be afforded equal opportunities, then consider making a donation to Your Pride Center! Your gift enables the Center to provide resources for coming out, connecting with community, advancing GLBT rights, and so much more. You can donate online at www.YourPrideCenter.org, or call the Pride Center at (719) 471-4429 to talk with one of our team members.

The Pride Center strives to create a level playing field for lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender individuals and families in our community. Your Pride Center provides: Advocacy and Voter Education; Social Activities and Rap Groups; Community Events; Community Health Navigation; Business Networking; Colorado Springs PrideFest; Help-Line; Resources; Drop-In Center; Internet Café; and more!

Sign up to receive the LunchBreak weekly E-Newsletter, Colorado Springs' Source for GLBT News, Information and Events. Email LunchBreak@YourPrideCenter.org.

Check Out GLBT-Owned and GLBT-Friendly business and organizations in Rainbow Pages. Pick up a copy at the Pride Center, or visit Rainbow Pages Online at www.YourPrideCenter.org.

Don't miss Colorado Springs PrideFest on the 3rd Sunday each July!

For additional resources and information or for health and advocacy resources, please call the Center's Help-Line: (719) 471-4429.

Here are a few important social service resources for the GLBT community.
For additional resources, please contact Your Pride Center at (719) 471-4429.

Dignity

www.dignityusa.org
(719) 685-5343
GLBT Catholic support group

Gill Foundation & Gay & Lesbian Fund for Colorado

www.gillfoundation.org
(719) 473-4455
Grant-Making Foundation

Inside/Out Youth Services (Serving Youth ages 13-22)

www.insideoutys.org
(719) 328-1056

The mission of Inside/Out is to empower, educate and advocate for lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, intersex and questioning (LGBTIQ) youth from the Pikes Peak region of Southern Colorado. Our mission has two primary foci: to create a safe space and support system for all youth in our community, and to simultaneously work to make our community safer and more accepting of gender and sexual orientation diversity.

PAGE (Peak Area Gender Expressions)

www.geocities.com/peakareagenderexpressions
Serving transgender people in the Pikes Peak Region.

PFLAG (Parents, Friends and Families of GLBT people)

http://members.tde.com/pflagcos
(719) 575-8658
A support group for parents, friends and families of GLBT people.

Pikes Peak Lavender Film Festival

www.pplff.org
Colorado's premier GLBT Film Festival

Pikes Peak Metropolitan Community Church: Pikes Peak Chapter of MCC

www.ppmcc.org
1102 S. 21st Street
Colorado Springs, CO 80904
(719) 634-3771
Pikes Peak Metropolitan Community Church is a place for everyone, with a special invitation to those who are marginalized by their society. We believe that the love of God and the ministry of Jesus teach that all are welcome at the table of the Divine. Therefore, MCC is a place for those who have a religious background and those who do not. It is a place for people for all sexual orientations, gender expressions, physical abilities, and ethnicitees. We are diverse in body, spirit, and thoughts, but we come together seeking unity. We come to create a more loving world, a more peaceful world, and a more just world. Join us.

Pride Center lending library

www.yourpridecenter.org
(719) 471-4429

Southern Colorado AIDS Project

www.s-cap.org
(719) 578-9092

Suicide Prevention Partnership

2860 S. Circle Dr. Suite 102
Colorado Springs, CO 80906
(719) 573-7447 office or (719) 596-LIFE (5433)

Local Hotline available 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, answered by volunteers to help people in crisis. Suicide Prevention Partnership also has many resources for those seeking help with depression and other mental health problems and provides a FREE treatment program for those who are uninsured or under insured, both adults and adolescents who are in crisis and need counseling.

Urban Peak

(719) 630-3223
Services for GLBT homeless youth

A New Path

Hayden Matthews

I see with my eyes wide open
I observe with an open mind
When everything around me shatters
I move forward stepping over the shards
Nothing can stop me now
No one can pull me down
I'm moving mountains one rock at a time
It's building my strength in soul
All I can ask for is patience
And guidance wherever I go

Thanks for proving my suspicions about counseling wrong. You're amazing!
Hayden

Seasons change, don't you?
Clinton!

Dear - I am Billi Lamp Post !!